BOY

Publisher's Note.

This NEW LONG STORY is the most important volume by MARIE CORELLI published for some years, and the first issued since the Author's serious illness.

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Fiftieth Thousand

BOY

A SKETCH

By MARIE CORELLI

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To

MY DEAREST FRIEND IN THE WORLD

BERTHA VYVER

WHO HAS KNOWN ALL MY LIFE FROM CHILDHOOD

AND HAS BEEN THE WITNESS OF ALL MY

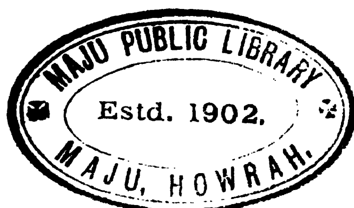
LITERARY WORK FROM ITS

VERY BEGINNING

THIS SIMPLE STORY

IS

GRATEFULLY AND LOVINGLY DEDICATED



BOY



CHAPTER I

It is said by many people who are supposed to "know things," that our life is frequently, if not always, influenced by the first impressions we ourselves receive of its value or worthlessness. Some folks, presuming to be wiser even than the wisest, go so far as to affirm that if you, while still an infant in long clothes, happen to take a disgust at the manner and customs of your parents, you will inevitably be disgusted at most events and persons throughout the remainder of your earthly pilgrimage. If any truth exists in such a statement, then "Boy" had excellent cause to be profoundly disappointed in his prospects at a very early outset of his career. He sat in what is sometimes called a "feeding-chair," wedged in by a bar which guarded him from falling forward or tumbling out upon the floor, and the said bar was provided with an ingenious piece of wood, which was partially hollowed out in such wise as to keep him

firm by his fat waist, as well as to provide a resting-place for the plateful of bread-and-milk which he was enjoying as much as circumstances would permit him to enjoy anything. Every now and then he beat the plate solemnly with his spoon, as though improvising a barbaric melody on a new sort of tom-tom,—and lifting a pair of large, angelic blue eyes upwards, till their limpid light seemed to meet and mix with the gold-glint of his tangled curls, he murmured pathetically,—

"Oh, Poo Sing! Does 'oo feels ill? Does 'oo feels bad? Oh, Poo Sing!"

Now, "Poo Sing" was not a Japanese toy, or a doll, or a bird, or any innocent object of a kind to attract a child's fancy; "Poo Sing" was nothing but a Man, and a disreputable creature even at that. "Poo Sing" was Boy's father, and "Poo Sing" was for the moment—to put it quite mildly—blind drunk. "Poo Sing" had taken his coat and waistcoat off, and had pulled out the ends of his shirt in a graceful white festoon all round the waistband of his trousers. "Poo Sing" had also apparently done some hard combing to his hair, for the bulk of it stood somewhat up on end, and a few grizzled and wiry locks strayed in disorderly fashion across his inflamed nose and puffy eyelids, this effect emphasising the already half-foolish, half-infuriated expression of his face. "Poo Sing" staggered to and fro, his heavy body scarcely seeming to belong

to his uncertain legs, and between sundry attacks of hiccough, he trolled out scraps of song, now high, now low, sometimes in a quavering falsetto, sometimes in a threatening bass; while Boy listened to him wonderingly, and regarded his divers antics over the bar of the "feeding-chair" with serious compassion,—the dulcet murmur of, "Does 'oo feels bad? Poo Sing!" recurring at intervals between mouthfuls of bread-and-milk and the rhythmic beat of the spoon. They were a strangely assorted couple,—Boy and "Poo Sing," albeit they were father and son. Boy, with his fair round visage and bright halo of hair, looked more like a child-angel than a mortal,—and "Poo Sing," in his then condition, resembled no known beast upon earth, since no beast ever gets voluntarily drunk, save Man. Yet it must not for a moment be imagined that "Poo Sing" was not a gentleman. He *was* a gentleman,—most distinctly,—most emphatically. He would have told you so himself, had you presumed to doubt it, with any amount of oaths to press home the fact. He would have spluttered at you somewhat in the following terms:—

"My father was a gentleman,—and my grandfather was a gentleman—and my great-grandfather was a gentleman—and d——n you, sir, our people were all gentlemen, every sanguinary man-jack of them, back to the twelfth century! No tommy-rot with me! None of your mean, skulking, money-grubbing Yankee millionaires in *our* lot! Why, you d——d rascal!

Call me a gentleman!—I should pretty much think so! I am a D'Arcy-Muir,—and I have the blood of kings in my veins—d——n you!"

Gentleman! Of course he was a gentleman! His language proved it. And his language was the first lesson in English Boy received, though he was not aware of its full significance. So that when two or three years later on Boy cried out "D——n rascal papa!" quite suddenly and vociferously, he had no consciousness of saying anything that was not the height of filial tenderness and politeness. To be a D'Arcy-Muir, meant to be the descendant of a long line of knights and noblemen who had once upon a time possessed huge castles with deep dungeons, where serfs and close kindred could be conveniently imprisoned and murdered at leisure without distinction as to character or quality;—knights and noblemen who some generations onward were transformed into "six-bottle-men" who thought it seemly to roll under their dining-tables dead drunk every evening, and who, having merged themselves and their "blue blood" into this present nineteenth-century Captain the Honourable James D'Arcy-Muir, the father of Boy,—were, we must suppose, in their condition of departed spirits, perfectly satisfied that they had bestowed a blessing upon the world by the careful production of such a "gentleman" and Christian.

Captain the Honourable, mindful of his race and breeding, took care to marry a lady,—whose ancestry

was only just in a slight degree lower than his own. She could not trace her lineage back to the twelfth century, still she came of what is sometimes called a good old stock, and she was handsome enough as a girl, though always large, lazy and unintelligent. Indolence was her chief characteristic ;—she hated any sort of trouble. She only washed herself under protest, as a sort of concession to the civilisation of the day. She had been gifted with an abundance of beautiful hair, of a somewhat coarse texture, yet rich in colour and naturally curly,—it was "a nuisance," she averred,—and as soon as she married, she cut it short "to save the bother of doing it in the morning" as she herself stated. Until she had secured a husband, she had complied sufficiently with the rules of society to keep herself tidily dressed ;—but both before and after her boy was born, she easily relapsed into the slovenly condition which she considered "comfort," and which was her habitual nature. Truth to tell, she had no incentive or ambition to appear at her best. She had not been married to Captain the Honourable D'Arcy-Muir one week before she discovered his partiality for strong drink, and being far too lymphatic to urge resistance, she sank into a state of passive resignation to circumstances. What was the good of a pretty "toilette"? Her husband never noticed how she dressed,—whether she wore satin or sackcloth was a matter of equal indifference to him,—so, finding that a short skirt and loose-fitting blouse formed a com-

fortable sort of "get-about" costume, she adopted it, and stuck to it morning, noon, and night. Always inclined to *embonpoint*, she managed to get extremely stout in a very short time; and chancing to read in a journal an article on "hygiene," which eloquently proved that corsets were harmful and really dangerous to health, she decided to do without them. So that by the time Boy was four years old, Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, in her continual study of personal ease, had developed a loose, floppy sort of figure, which the easy fitting blouse covered, but did not disguise;—to save all possibility of corns she encased her somewhat large feet in soft felt slippers,—swept the short hair from off her brows, did without collars and cuffs, and "managed" her small house in Hereford Square in her own fashion, which "managing" meant having everything at sixes and sevens,—meals served at all hours,—and a general preparation for the gradual destruction of Boy's digestion by giving him his bread-and-milk and other nourishment at moments when he least expected it.

Thus, it may be conceded by those who know anything about married life and housekeeping, that Boy began his career among curious surroundings. From his "feeding-chair" he saw strange sights,—sights which often puzzled him, and caused him to beat monotonous time on his plate with his bâton-spoon in order to distract his little brain. Two large looming figures occupied his horizon—"Muzzy" and "Poo

Sing." "Muzzy" was the easy-going stout lady with the felt slippers, who gave him his bread-and-milk and said he was *her* boy,—"Poo Sing" was, in the few tranquil moments of his existence, understood to be "Dads" or "Papa." Boy somehow could never call him either "Dads" or "Papa" when he was seized by his staggering fits; such terms were not sufficiently compassionate for an unfortunate gentleman who was subject to a malady which would not allow him to keep steady on his feet without clutching at the sideboard or the mantelpiece. Boy had been told by "Muzzy" that when "Papa" rolled about the room he was "very ill,"—and the most eloquent language could not fittingly describe the innocent and tender emotions of pity in Boy's mind when he beheld the progenitor of his being thus cruelly afflicted! Were it possible to touch a drunkard's heart in the mid career of his drunkenness, then the gentle murmur of "Poo Sing!" from the fresh rosy lips of a little child, and that child his own son, might have moved to a sense of uneasy shame and remorse the particularly tough and fibrous nature of Captain the Honourable D'Arcy-Muir. But Captain the Honourable was of that ancient and noble birth which may be seen asserting itself in rowdy theatre-parties at restaurants in Piccadilly,—and he, with the rest of his distinguished set, said openly "D——n sentiment!" As for any sacredness in the life of a child, or any idea of grave responsibility resting upon him as a father, for that child's

future, such primitive notions never occurred to him. Sometimes when Boy stared at him very persistently with solemnly enquiring grave blue eyes, he would become suddenly and violently irritated, and would demand, "What is the little beggar staring at? Looks like a d——d idiot!"

Then pouring more whisky out of the ever-present bottle into the ever-present glass, he would yell to his wife, "See here, old woman! This child is going to be an infernal idiot! A regular water-on-the-brain, knock-down idiot! Staring at me for all the world as if I were a gorilla! He's over-fed,—that's what's the matter! Guzzling on bread-and-milk till he can't get a drop more down. Never saw such a d——d little pig in all my d——d life!"

Thus would this gentleman of irreproachable descent bawl forth, the while Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, provokingly passive, irritatingly flabby, and indolently inert, preserved a discreet silence. Such behaviour on her husband's part was of daily occurrence,—"She knew James's little ways," she would remark to any sympathising friends who chanced to discourse with her on the delicate and honeyed bliss of her matrimonial life. "Why did you marry him?" was the question often asked of her, whereat she would answer betwixt a sigh and a yawn,—"Really I don't know! He seemed quite as decent as most men, and he belongs to a splendid family!" "Did you ever love him?" was another query once put to her

by a daring interlocutor inclined rather to romance than reality. Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir looked politely surprised.

"Love! Oh, I don't think that had very much to do with it," she said. "One doesn't think about love after one is fifteen or sixteen. That's all goosey-goosey-gander, you know!"

And a placid smile of superior wisdom lit up her fat face as she thus clinched the would-be heart-searching enquiries of the mere sentimentalist. Because, after all, as she argued, if Jim *would* get drunk it was no use attempting to thwart him,—he was master of himself and of his own actions. When, after a good heavy bout of it, he was laid up in bed with a galloping pulse, throbbing veins, parched tongue, and a half-crazed brain, that also was no business of hers. She had made no attempt to either restrain or guide him, because she knew it was no use trying to do either. If he did not drink in the house, he would drink outside the house;—if he did not drink openly, he would drink on the sly,—few men ever took a woman's advice for their good, though they would take all women's recommendations to the bad. Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir was perfectly aware of this peculiar code of man's morals, as also of the strange limitations of man's logic, and knowing these things was content to make herself as bodily comfortable as she could, and let other matters go as an untoward fate ordained. Thus it happened that it was only

Boy who really thought at all seriously concerning the puzzle of existence. Boy, whose proper Christian name was Robert, seemed nearly always preoccupied about something or other. Judging by the generally wistful expression of his small features, it might be presumed that he had memories. Probably most children have, though they are incapable of expressing them. The enormous gulf of difference between the very young and their elders, exists not only on account of the disparity in years, —but also because the elders have retained, for the most part, nothing more on their minds than the quickly crowding and vanishing impressions of this present world,—while the children are, we may imagine, busy with vague recollections of something better than the immediate condition of things,—recollections which occasionally move them to wonder why their surroundings have become so suddenly and strangely altered. It is impossible not to see, in the eyes of many of these little human creatures, a look of infinite perplexity, sorrow and enquiry,—a look which gradually fades away as they grow older and more accustomed to the ordinary commonplace business of natural existence, while the delicate and dim memories of the Soul in a former state wax faint and indistinct, never to recur again, perhaps, till death re-flashes them on the interior sight with the repeated and everlasting assurance that "here is not our rest." Boy had thoughts of the past, though none of the

future;—he was quite sure that all was not formerly as it appeared to him now,—that there was a time, set far away among rainbow eternities, when "Muzzy" and "Poo Sing" were *non est*,—when indeed "Muzzy" and "Poo Sing" would have seemed the wildest incoherences and maddest impossibilities. How it had chanced that the rainbow eternities had dispersed for awhile,—had rolled back as it were into space, and had allowed the strange spectacle of "Muzzy" and "Poo Sing" to intervene, was more than Boy could explain, consciously or unconsciously. But he was certain he had not always known these two now apparently necessary personages,—and he was equally certain he *had* known some sort of beings infinitely more interesting than they could ever be. Fully impressed by this inward conviction, he often dwelt upon it in his own mind,—and this it was that gave him the lovely far-away look in his dreamy blue eyes,—the tender little quivering smile on his rosy mouth, and the whole serene and wise expression of his fair and chubby countenance. Scarcely four years old as he was, it was evident that he had the intuition of some truer life than those around him dreamed of, —the halo of divine things was still about him,—the "God's image" was just freshly stamped on the bright new coin of his being,—and it remained for the coming years to witness how long the brightness would last in the hands of the untrustworthy individuals who had it in possession. For it is a dangerous fallacy to

aver that every man has the making of his destiny in his own hands: to a certain extent he has, no doubt, and with education and firm resolve, he can do much to keep down the Beast and develop the Angel,—but a terrific responsibility rests upon those often voluntarily reckless beings, his parents, who, without taking thought, use the God's privilege of giving life, while utterly failing to perceive the means offered to them for developing and preserving that life under the wisest and most harmonious conditions. It is certainly true that many parents do what they call their "best" for their children,—that is, they work for them, and educate them, and "place" them advantageously, as they think, in life,—but they are apt to forget that this "life" they set store by, is not only a question of food, clothing, money, and position,—its central pivot is Thought,—and thought begins with the first brain-pulsations. There is no use or sense in denying the fact,—it is so. Therefore the progenitors of those living thought-cells cannot possibly shirk the moral obligation which they take upon themselves from the very moment of a child's birth. "The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children" is often quoted as a merciless axiom,—but it is merely the declaration of a natural law, which, if broken, brings punishment in its train.

Boy, lately arrived from the Infinite, was guiltless of his present dubious surroundings. He did not

make his "honourable" father a drunkard, or his mother a sloven. He came into the world designed, perchance, to be the redemption of both his parents, had they received his innocent presence in that spirit. But they did not. They accepted him as a natural result of marriage, and took no more heed of him than a pair of monkeys casually observant of their first offspring. They, by virtue of the evolution theory, should, as human beings, have been on a scale higher than the Simian ancestor,—but Captain D'Arcy-Muir was not even on a par with that hairy personage, inasmuch as the bygone aboriginal monkey, not being aware of strong drink, could not degrade himself that way. As long as Boy was fed, clothed, taken out, and put to bed regularly, "Muzzy" and "Poo Sing" considered they were doing all their necessary duty by him. "Muzzy" would indeed have been profoundly astonished if she had known that Boy took her clothing into his consideration, and wondered why hooks were often off, and buttons often gone from her garments, and why her hair was so like some of the stuffing of the old arm-chair,—woolly sort of stuffing, which was coming through the leather for want of mending. Boy used to compare "Muzzy" with another lady who sometimes came to visit him,—Miss Letitia Leslie,—a wonderful vision to Boy's admiring eyes,—a rustling, glistening dream, made up of soft dove-coloured silk and violet-scented old lace, and tender, calm blue eyes, and small

hands with big diamonds flashing on their dainty whiteness,—"Miss Letty," as she was generally called, and "that purse-proud old maid," as Captain the Honourable frequently designated her. Boy had his own title for her,—it was "Kiss-Letty," instead of "Miss Letty,"—and he would often ask, in dull moments when the numerous perplexities of his small mind became too entangled for him to bear—"Where is Kiss-Letty? Me wants Kiss-Letty! Kiss-Letty loves Boy,—Boy loves Kiss-Letty!"

And to hear him sweetly meandering along in this fashion, the uninitiated stranger might have imagined "Kiss-Letty" to be a kind of fairy,—an elf, born of moonlight and lilies, rather than what she really was, a spinster of forty-five, who made no pretences to be a whit younger than she was,—a spinster who was perfectly content to wear her own beautiful grey hair, and to wish for no "touching up" on the delicate worn pallor of her cheeks—a spinster, moreover, who was proud of her spinsterhood, as it was the sign of her unbroken fidelity to a dead man who had loved her. Miss Letitia Leslie had had her history, her own private tragedy of tears and heart-break; but the depths of sorrow in her soul had turned to sweetness instead of sourness,—her own grief had taught her to be compassionate of all griefs, and the unkind sword of fate that had pierced her gentle breast rendered her delicately cautious of ever wounding, by so much as a word or a look, the

sensitive feelings of others. Death and circumstance had made her the independent mistress of a large fortune, which she used lavishly for the private doing of good where evil abounded. Into the foul and festering slums of the great city—into the shabby dwellings of poorly paid clerks and half-starved curates,—up among the barely furnished attics where struggling artists worked for scanty livelihood and the distant hope of fame, "Kiss-Letty" took her sweet and gracious presence, wearing a smile that was a very good reflex of God's sunshine, and speaking comfort in a voice as tender as that of any imagined angel bringing God's messages. Much of the grinding of the ceaseless wheel of tribulation did Miss Letitia see, as she went to and fro on her various errands of mercy and friendship; but perhaps among all the haunts and homes where her personality was familiar, her interest had seldom been more strongly aroused than in the ill-ordered household in Hereford Square, where Captain the Honourable D'Arcy-Muir drank and swore, and his wife "slovened" the hours away in muddle and misanthropy. For here was Boy,—Boy, a soft, smiling morsel of helpless life and innocent expectancy,—Boy, who stretched out plump mottled arms to "Kiss-Letty," and said, chucklingly, "Ullo!"—(an exclamation he had picked up from the friendly policeman at the corner of the square, who greeted him thus when he went out in his perambulator)—

"Ullo! 'Ows 'oo, Kiss-Letty? Wants Boy out! Kiss-Letty take Boy wiz her walk-talk."

Which observation, rendered into heavier English, implied that Boy politely enquired after Miss Letitia's health, and desired to go out walking and likewise talking with that lady.

And no one in all the world responded more promptly or more lovingly to Boy's delightful amenities than Miss Letitia did. The wisely-sweet expression of the child's face fascinated her,—she saw in Boy the possibilities of noble manhood, graced perhaps by the rarest gifts of genius. Believers in hereditary development would have asked her how she could imagine it possible for a child born of such parents to possess an ideal or exceptionally endowed nature? To which she would have replied that she did not believe in the heritage so much as the environment of life. Here she was partly wrong and partly right. Such inexplicable things happen in the evolution of one particular human being from a whole chain of other human beings that it is impossible to gauge correctly the result of the whole. Why, for example, the poet Keats should have had such indifferent parentage will always be somewhat of a mystery. And why men, lineally descended from "ancient, noble and honourable" families should, in this day, have degenerated into turf-gamblers, drunkards and social rascals generally, is also a bewildering conundrum.

In the case of Keats, birth and environment were against him,—in the case of the modern aristocrat birth and environment are with him. The one has become an English classic; the other is an English disgrace. Who shall clear up the darkness surrounding the working of this law? Miss Letitia made no attempt to penetrate such physiological obscurities,—she simply argued that for Boy to be brought up in a "muddle," and set face to face with the ever-present whisky-bottle, was decidedly injurious to his future prospects. The D'Arcy-Muirs were poor, though they had "expectations,"—she, Miss Letitia, was rich. She had no relatives,—no one in the world had the least claim upon her,—and she had serious thoughts of adopting Boy. Would his parents part with him? That was a knotty point, a delicate and very doubtful question. But she had considered it for some time carefully, and had come to the reasonable conclusion that, as Boy seemed to be rather in the way of his father and mother than otherwise, and that moreover, as her terms of adoption were inclusive of making him her sole heir, it was probable she might gain the victory. And the very day on which this true narrative begins, when Captain the Honourable was executing his whisky war-dance to the accompaniment of his son's murmured "Poo Sing!" and rhythmic spoon-tapping, was the one selected by the gentle lady to commence operations, or, as she put it, "to break the proposition

gradually" to the strange parents whose daily lives furnished such a singular example of wedded felicity to their observant offspring. When her dainty brougham, drawn by its sleek and spirited roans, drew up at the door of the house in Hereford Square, there were various signs even outside that habitation to fill the order-loving spirit of Miss Letitia with doubtful qualms and hesitations. To begin with, there was not a blind in any of the windows that was drawn up straight; they were all awry. This gave the dwelling a generally squinting, leering, look which was not pleasant. Then again, the door-steps were dirty. There were strange, smeary pieces of paper floating down the area, in grimy companionship with broken bits of straw. The bell-handle hung out of its socket, somewhat like an eye undergoing the latest surgical operation for cataract. There were recent traces of coal on the pavement,—a ton had evidently just been shot down the "hole-into-the-cellar" arrangement which some brilliant British "bright idea" has invented for the greater accumulation of dirt in the streets; and the coal-men had not troubled to "clean up" after the performance Miss Letitia, stepping lightly out of her carriage, was compelled to crunch the heels of her pretty little *brodequins* in coal-dust, and soil the delicate edge of her frilled silk petticoat in the same. Cautiously she handled the helpless-looking bell-pull, with the result that a hollow tinkling sound awakened the

interior echoes. The door opened, and a slatternly maid-servant appeared.

"Is Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir—— ?"

"Yes, 'm, at home to you, 'm, of course, 'm. But she's hout to most, on account of master's bein' orful bad. Orful bad he is. Step in, please 'm."

Whereupon Miss Letitia "stepped in," asking pleasantly as she did so,—

"And how is dear Boy?"

"Oh, jes' the same, 'm! Allus smilin' an' comfoble-like. Never see such a child for good temper. Seems allus a-thinkin' pretty. This way, 'm!"

And she escorted her visitor into a small side-room which Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir called her "boudoir,"—announcing briskly,—

"Miss Leslie, 'm!"

"Dear me!" and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, clad in the usual short skirt and ill-fitting blouse, rose to receive the in-coming guest.

"How nice of you, Letitia, to come! So early too! I'm afraid luncheon has been cleared——"

"Pray don't speak of it," interrupted Miss Leslie—"of course at four o'clock——"

"Is it four? Dear me!" and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir smiled sleepily. "Why, then it's time for tea. You will have some tea?"

"Thank you!" murmured Miss Letty, "but don't don't put yourself out in any way. Is Boy—— ?"

"Quite well? Oh yes!" and Boy's mother rang

the bell as she spoke. "Boy is in the dining-room with his father. He has just had his bread-and-milk. I have left him there because I think he keeps Jim a little bit in order. Jim is really quite impossible to-day,—but of course he wouldn't hurt the child."

"Do you mean," said Miss Letitia, her cheeks growing paler, "that your husband is . . . well!—*you* know! And that Boy is with him while in that terrible condition?"

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir laughed.

"Of course! How horrified you look, Letitia! But you have no idea how useful Boy is in that way. He really saves pounds' worth of furniture. When Boy is strapped in his chair, and Jim is on the booze, Jim never knocks the things about as he would if he were alone,—because you see he is afraid of upsetting Boy. It is not out of kindness to Boy exactly, but simply because he hates to hear a child yell. It gets on his nerves. Then of course Boy thinks his father is ill, and pities him so much that the two get on together capitally."

And this lymphatic lump of a woman laughed again, the while Miss Letitia gazed blankly at the fireplace and endeavoured to control her indignant feelings. The maidservant came in just then in answer to the bell.

"Bring the tea, Gerty,"—commanded her mistress with quite a grand air, as one who should say "bid the thousand menials in the outer court of

the castle serve me with delicacies on their bended knees."

Gerty had a severe cold, and sniffed violently and unbecomingly.

"Please 'm, the milkman ain't been yet. This mornin' he said as he might be late, as there was a family t'other side of the square as liked their meals punctual, and he guessed he'd have to go that side first instead of ours. And there ain't none left from the mornin'; Master Boy's 'ad it all."

"Dear, sweet, greedy little pig!" smiled Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir affably. "Well, you can bring the teacups and the teapot, and the kettle and the bread-and-butter—and—Oh! there is condensed milk, I know: will you have condensed milk, Letitia?"

Miss Letitia responded somewhat primly,—

"No, certainly not!" Then, regretting her rather sharp tone of voice, she added, "You must not think me fanciful, but I cannot bear condensed milk in my tea. You know I come of an old Devonshire family, and I believe I grew up on genuine milk and genuine cream."

"Oh, but condensed milk is *quite* genuine!" said Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir. "I *love* it! I eat it on bread-and-butter often instead of jam; you must not have old maids' prejudices, Letitia!" And she smiled the provoking smile of a superior being who knows all the best things of life without teaching or experience.

Miss Letty sat patiently under the verdict of "old maids' prejudices," wondering how on earth she was going to broach the subject which was uppermost in her mind to this woman who seemed for the moment to have absorbed all the intellect of which she was capable into the bland consideration of condensed milk. She started the conversation again hesitatingly.

"Is Captain D'Arcy-Muir likely to go out presently, do you think?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say," replied Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, still smiling. "You see he can scarcely stand—he won't dress himself properly—and he has just taken to singing: listen!" And she held up a fat forefinger to invite attention. Miss Letitia had no need to strain her ears for the extraordinary sounds which came fitfully through the door,—sounds between a cough and a yell, wherewith were intermingled the familiar words—

"Ole King Co—ole
Was a jo—olly old so—ul!"

"Pray, pray!" implored Miss Letty nervously,—"do get Boy out of that room! Really, my dear, it isn't fit for the child. I beg of you! I—I—should like to see Boy!"

"Well, *I* can't go and fetch him," declared Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir with a deeply-injured expression; "I should only get pushed out of the room, or hit in the

eye, if I attempted it when Jim is like this. But I'll send Gerty."

And as Gerty just then entered with all the necessities for tea, minus the milk, she added,

"Fetch Master Boy in here, will you?"

"Yes, 'm. If he'll come with me."

She disappeared to fulfil her mission.

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir sank back into the depths of her easy-chair with the manner of one who has done every duty that could possibly be expected of her. Miss Letitia clasped and unclasped her neatly gloved hands nervously. The noises of mingled coughing and yelling increased in ferocity,—and soon they were broken by two widely differing sounds,—a drunken curse, and a child's laughter.

"D——n you, get out of this!"

"Kiss-Letty! Ooo—ee! My kissy-kissy Kiss-Letty!"

And escaping from Gerty's hand, Boy literally danced into the room.

CHAPTER II

MAKING straight for Miss Letitia, the jumping bundle of dimples, gold curls, short knickers and waggling pinafore, came with a wild bound into that lady's arms.

"Oo-ee!" he once more exclaimed—"Vi'lets!"

And, discovering a bunch of those sweet blossoms half-hidden in the folds of Miss Leslie's soft lace necktie, he burrowed his little nose into them with delighted eagerness,—then looking up again, and smiling angelically, he repeated in a dulcet murmur, "'Es! Vi'lets! Oo' is *vezy* sweet, zoo Kiss-Letty!"

Miss Letitia pressed him to her breast, patted him, smoothed his tousled locks, and took off his loosely-hanging pinafore, thereby disclosing his whole chubby form, clad in what city tailors euphoniously term a 'small gent's Jack Tar.'

"Well, Boy!" she said, her gentle voice trembling with quite a delicious cooing sweetness—"how are you to-day?"

"Me vezy well," answered Boy placidly, twining round his dumpy fingers a long delicately-linked

gold chain which 'Kiss-Letty' always wore—"Vezy well 'sank 'oo!" (this with a big sigh). "Me awfoo' bozzered" (bothered) "'bout Dads! Poo Sing! Vezy —*vezy* ill!"

And Boy conveyed such a heartrending expression of deep distress into his beautiful blue eyes, that Miss Letitia was quite touched, and was almost persuaded into a sense of pity for the degraded creature who was "putting a thief into his mouth to steal away his brains," in the opposite room.

"You see, Letitia," murmured Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir with a fat complacent smile—"You see just how Boy takes it? He and his father are the most perfect friends in the world!"

Good Miss Leslie looked as she felt,—pained and puzzled. How was she to broach the idea she had of adopting Boy, if he was already considered by his stupid mother to be a sort of stop-gap or "buffer" between herself and the drunken rages of her "honourable" lord and master? She resolved to temporize.

"I have been wondering," she began gently, as she settled the little fellow more comfortably on her lap "whether you would let Boy come and stay with me for a few days——"

"Stay with *you*!" exclaimed Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir—and so surprised was she that she actually lifted her bulky form an inch or two out of its sunken attitude in the arm-chair—"With *you*, Letitia? A child like

that? Why, you would not know in the least what to do with him!"

"I think I should," submitted Miss Letty, with a little smile,—"Besides, of course you could send Gerty with him if you liked. But I do not think it would be necessary. I have an excellent maid who is devoted to children;—and then he could have a large room to play about in—and——"

"Oh, it would never do!—never—never!" declared Boy's mother, shaking her head with a half-reproachful, half-compassionate air. "You see, my dear Letitia, it is not as if you were married and had children of your own. You wouldn't understand how to manage Boy a bit."

"You think not?" said Miss Letty patiently. "Well—perhaps I might be a little ignorant—but would you let me try?"

"I could not—I really could not!" and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir smoothed her floppy blouse over her massive bosom with a protective pat of her large hand. "Boy would simply break his heart without me. Wouldn't you, Boy?"

Boy thus adjured, looked round enquiringly. He had been busy arranging "Kiss-Letty's" gold chain in loops and twists, such as pleased his fancy, and thus employed, had failed to follow the conversation.

"How wouldn't Boy?" he demanded.

"Boy wouldn't like to leave Muzzy," explained Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir unctuously—"would he?"

Boy was still meditatively concerned with the looping of the gold chain.

"Leave Muzzy?" he queried. "Wha' for?"

"What for?" echoed his mother. "To go with Miss Letty—all by your own self—and no kind good Muzzy to take care of you!"

Boy stopped twisting the gold chain. Things began to look serious. He put one rosy finger into his rosier mouth, and started to consider the question. "No kind good Muzzy to take care of you." Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir was her own trumpeter on this occasion. That she was a "kind good Muzzy" was entirely her own idea. If Boy had been able to express himself with thorough lucidity, he would most probably have given the palm for "kindness and goodness," and "taking care of him," to the servant Gerty, rather than to Muzzy. But his little heart told him he ought to love his Muzzy best of all—and yet—how about "Kiss-Letty"? He hesitated.

"Me loves Muzzy *vezy* much," he murmured, lowering his pretty eyes,—while his sensitive little underlip began to quiver—"But me loves Kiss-Letty too. Me *would* like out wiz Kiss-Letty!"

And having thus taken courage to declare his true sentiments, he felt more independent, and raised his golden head with a curious little air of defiance and appeal intermingled. Just then a diversion occurred in the entrance of the servant Gerty, carrying a jug.

"Oh, here *is* the milk at last!" said Mrs. D'Arcy-

Muir, with a sigh of relief. "Now we can have tea. Gerty, what do you think?—here is Miss Leslie wanting to take Boy to stay with her for a few days! Did ever you hear of such a thing!"

Gerty sniffed her usual sniff, which as she gave it, almost amounted to an enigma.

"I should let him go, 'm, if I were you, 'm," she said, whereat Miss Letty could have embraced her. "He ain't doin' no good 'ere, with the master on in his tearin' tantrums an' swillin' whisky fit to bust hisself, an' really there's no tellin' what might happen. Oh yes, 'm,—I should let him go, 'm!"

"Would you really?" and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir rose and lolled herself lazily along to the tea-table—"Well!—Do you want him to-day, Letitia?"

"Why, yes, I can take him at once," replied Miss Leslie, quite trembling with excitement, and commending Gerty to all the special favours of providence for the evident influence she exerted on the flabby mind of her mistress—"Nothing will please me better."

"Such a funny notion of yours!" smiled Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, hovering over the tea-things like a sort of large loosely-feathered bird. "You are such a regular old maid, Letitia, that I should have thought you wouldn't have had a child messing about in your beautiful house for the world. However, if you really want him, take him,—but you must have him alone—I can't spare Gerty."

Gerty smiled broadly.

"Oh, Miss Leslie won't want me, 'm," she cheerfully declared. "Master Boy don't give no trouble. Shall I put his clothes together, 'm? He ain't got nothing but his white flannel sailor-suit and two little shirts and nightgowns."

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir sighed wearily.

"Oh dear, don't bother me about such things!" she said. "Just make a brown-paper parcel of what you think the child will want for a week, and put it in Miss Leslie's brougham. You came in your brougham, Letitia? Of course. Yes. That will be all right. Put it all in the brougham, Gerty."

"Yes, 'm. Shall I bring in Master Boy's hat and overcoat in here?"

"Certainly. Dear me, what a fuss!" Here Gerty promptly left the room. "One would think the child was going to the wilds of Africa! Do you take sugar, Letitia? Yes? Ah, you are not inclined to be at all stout, are you?"—this with a somewhat envious glance at Miss Leslie's still perfectly graceful and *svelte* figure—"No, I should think you must be nearly all skin and bone. Now, *I* can never take sugar. I put on flesh directly. Here is your tea. Boy, do you want any more milk?"

Boy had, during the past few minutes, remained in a condition of bland staring. Vague notions that his "wanting out" with Kiss-Letty was going to be a granted and accomplished fact, pleased his little brain,

but he had no skill to discourse on his sensations, even in broken language. He was however too happy to require any extra feeding. He therefore declined the offer of 'more milk' with a negative shake of his gold curls, and after a little further consideration, clambered off Miss Letitia's knee and went to his mother.

"Me goin' out wiz Kiss-Letty?" he inquired with a solemn air.

"Yes. You are going to stay with her in her grand big house, away from poor Muzzy"—replied the 'poor Muzzy' in question, taking a large mouthful of bread-and-butter and swallowing it down with a gulp of tea. "And I hope you'll be a good boy."

"'Ope me be a goo' boy!" he echoed thoughtfully. "'Ess! Me tell Dads?"

Miss Letitia looked startled,—Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir smiled.

"No. You had better not tell Dads. He is ill, you know. When you come back he will be quite well."

"Sink so?" queried Boy dubiously.

"Think so? Of course I think so. Now don't stand staring there. Here's your picture-book,—look at that till Gerty brings you your hat and coat."

Boy took the interesting volume offered him, docilely, but without enthusiasm. He knew it well. Its torn covers,—the impossible beasts and birds depicted within it,—the extraordinary jumble of rhymes which Gerty would read to him at odd moments, and which he would afterwards think about in pained silence,—

all these things worried him. There was a large and elaborately ornamented *B* in the book, and—twisted in and out its curly formation—were two designs which were utterly opposed to each other,—a cricket-bat and a bumble-bee. The 'poetry' accompanying it said—

Fetch me the BAT.
To kill the RAT.

After this ferocious couplet came the flamboyant coloured drawing of a large yellow flower, unlike any flower ever born in any field of the wide world. The yellow flower being duly considered as a growth of distinct individuality, other two lines appeared—

Look here and see
The BUMBLE-BEE.

This particular page of his "picture-book" had often puzzled Boy. When Gerty had first read to him—

Fetch me the BAT
To kill the RAT,

he had had at once asked,—

"Where rat?"

Gerty had sought everywhere all over the ornate capital letter and the other designs on the page for the missing animal,—but in vain. Therefore she had been reluctantly compelled to admit the depressing truth,—

"There ain't no rat, Master Boy dear!"

"*Why* no rat?" pursued Boy, solemnly.

Driven to desperation, a bright idea suddenly crossed Gerty's brain.

"I 'xpect it's cos it's killed," she said,—"See, Master Boy! It's 'a bat to kill a rat.' And the rat's killed!"

"Poo' rat!" commented Boy thoughtfully—"Gone! Poo'—Poo' rat!—gone altogezzer!"

He sighed,—and refused to 'look here and see, the Bumble-bee.' He really wished to know *who* it was that had asked for a bat to kill a rat, and *why* that unknown individual had been so furiously inclined. But he kept these desires to himself; for he had an instinctive sense that though Gerty was all kindness, she was not quite the person to be trusted with his closest confidences.

Just now he went into a corner, picture-book in hand, and sat, watching his 'Muzzy' and 'Kiss-Letty' taking tea together. Muzzy's back was towards him, and he could not help wondering why it was so big and broad? Why it was so difficult to get *round* Muzzy for example? He had no such trouble with Kiss-Letty. She was so slim and yet so strong, —and once, when she had lifted him up and carried him from one room to the other, he felt as though he were 'throned light in air,' so easy and graceful had been the way she bore him. Now Muzzy always took hold of him as if he were a lump. Not that he argued this fact at all in his little mind,—he was

simply thinking—thinking,—yes, if the sober truth must be told, he was thinking quite sadly and seriously how it happened that Muzzy was ugly and Kiss-Letty pretty! It was such a pity Muzzy was ugly!—for surely it *was* ugly to have red blotches on the face, and hair like the arm-chair stuffing? Such a pity—such a pity for Muzzy? Such a pity too for Boy! Ah, and such a pity it is for all idle, slovenly women who "let themselves go" and think their children 'take no notice' of indolence, dirt, and discordant colours. The sense of beauty and fitness was very strong in Boy. Where he got it was a mystery,—it was certainly not a heritage derived from either of his parents. He did not know that 'Kiss-Letty' was many years older than 'Muzzy,'—but he did know that she was ever so much more charming and agreeable to look at. He judged by appearances,—and these were all in 'Kiss-Letty's' favour. For in truth the elderly spinster looked a whole decade younger than the more youthful married woman. Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, though she took life with such provokingly indifferent ease, 'wore' badly, —Miss Leslie, despite many concealed sorrows and disappointments, wore well. Her face was still rounded and soft-complexioned,—her eyes were bright and clear,—while her figure was graceful and her dress choice and elegant. Boy indeed thought 'Kiss-Letty' very beautiful, and he was not without experience. Several well-known "society beauties" of

the classed and labelled sort, who are hawked about in newspaper 'fashionable' columns as wearing blue or green, or "looking lovely in white," and "stately in pink"—were wont to visit Captain the Honourable and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir on their 'at-home' days, and Boy was always taken into the drawing-room to see them,—but somehow they made no impression on him. They lacked something—though he could not tell what that something was. None of them had the smile of Kiss-Letty, or her soft dove-like glance of eye. Peering at her now from his present corner Boy considered her a very angel of loveliness. And he was actually going away with her, to her 'grand big house,' Muzzy said. Boy tried to think what the 'grand big house' would be like. The nearest approach his imagination could make to it was Aladdin's palace, as pictured in one of the 'fairy landscapes' of a certain magic lantern which a very burly gentleman, a Major Desmond, had brought to him at Christmas. Major Desmond was a large, jovial, white-haired, white-moustached personage, with a rollicking mellow laugh, and an immense hand which, whenever it was laid on Boy's head, caressed his curls with the gentleness of a south wind touching the petals of a flower. Muzzy's hand was hard and heavy indeed compared to the hand of Major Desmond. Major Desmond was a friend of Kiss-Letty's,—that was all Boy knew about him,—that and the magic-lantern incident. Ruffling and crink-

ing up the pages of the too-familiar 'picture book' mechanically, Boy went on with his own little quaint sequence of thought,—till suddenly, just as Muzzy and Kiss-Letty had finished their tea, a dull crash was heard in the opposite room, accompanied by a loud oath—then came silence. Boy trotted out of his corner, his little face pale with fright.

"Oh *Poo'* Sing!" he cried. "Dads ill!—Dads hurted! Me go to Dads!"

"No—no!" and Miss Letty hastened to him and caught him in her arms—"No, dear! Wait a minute! Wait, darling! Let Mother see first what is the matter."

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir had risen, and was about to open the door and make some casual inquiry, when Gerty came in, somewhat pale but giggling.

"It's only master, 'm," she said. "His foot tripped, and down he fell. He ain't hurt hisself. He don't even trouble to get up—he's just a-sittin' on the floor with the whisky-bottle as comfoble as you please!"

Miss Letty shuddered as she listened, and clasped Boy more warmly to her heart, placing her gentle hands against his ears lest he should hear too much.

"Papa's all right, Boy dear," she said.—"He has just let something fall on the floor. See?"

"Zat all?" queried Boy with an anxious look.

"That's all. Now"—and Miss Letitia took his dumpy wee hand in her own and led him across the room—"come along, and we'll have a nice drive

together, shall we? Gerty, have you got Master Boy's things?"

"Yes, 'm." And Gerty, flopping down on both knees in front of the little fellow, pulled a miniature overcoat round his tiny form and stuck a sailor-hat (marked 'Invincible' on the ribbon) jauntily on his head—"There you are, Master Boy, dear! Ain't you grand, eh? Going away visiting all by your own self! Quite like a big man!"

Boy smiled vaguely but sweetly, and turned one of the buttons on his coat round and round meditatively. Quite like a big man, was he? Well, he did not feel very big, but on the contrary particularly small—and especially just now, because Muzzy was standing upright, looking down upon him with a spacious air of infinite and overwhelming condescension. Surely Muzzy was a very large woman?—might not one say *extra* large? Boy stretched out his hand and grasped her skirt, gazing wistfully up at the bulk above him,—the bulk which now stooped, like an over-full sack of wheat toppling forward, to kiss him and bid him good-bye.

"Remember, you've never been away from me before, Boy,"—and 'Muzzy' spoke in a kind of injured tone—"so I hope you will be good and obedient, and keep your clothes clean. And when you get to Miss Leslie's house, don't smear your fingers on the walls, and mind you don't break anything. You know it won't be as it is here,

where you can tumble about as you like all day and play——"

"Oh, but he *can*!" interposed Miss Leslie hastily—"I assure you he can!"

"Pardon me, Letitia, he can *not*"—and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir swelled visibly with matronly obstinacy as she spoke—"It is not likely that in *your* house you can have wooden soldiers all over the floor. It would be impossible. Boy has very odd ways with his soldiers. He likes to 'camp them out' in different spots of the pattern on the carpet—and of course it *does* make a place untidy. When one is a mother, one does not mind these things"—this with a superior and compassionate air—"but you, with your precise notions of order, will find it *very* trying."

Miss Leslie protested, with a little smile, that really she had no particularly 'precise' notions of order.

"Oh yes, you have," declared Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir emphatically—"Don't tell me you haven't, Letitia,—all old maids are the same. Then there is that dreadful Cow of Boy's,—the thing Major Desmond gave him, along with the magic lantern,—he can do without the lantern, of course—but I really am afraid he had better take his Cow!"

Miss Letitia laughed—and a very pretty, musical little laugh she had.

"Oh, by all means let us have the Cow!" she said gaily. "Where is it, Boy?"

Boy looked up, then down,—to the east, to the

west, and everywhere into the air, without committing himself to a reply. Gerty came to the rescue.

"I'll fetch it," she said briskly. "I saw it on Master Boy's bed a minute ago."

She left the room, to return again directly with the interesting animal in question—quite a respectably-sized toy cow with a movable head which wagged up and down for a long time when set in motion by the touch of a finger. It had a blue ribbon round its neck, and Boy called it 'Dunny.' He welcomed it now as he saw it with the confiding smile of long and experienced friendship.

"Ullo Dunny!" he said—"Wants out wiz Boy? Tum along zen!" And receiving the pasteboard quadruped in his arms he embraced it with effusion.

"It is most absurd!" said Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir grandiosely—"Still it would be rather awkward for you, Letitia, if he were to start crying for his Cow!"

"It would indeed!" and the laughter still lighted up Miss Letitia's soft eyes with a keen and merry twinkle—"I would not be without the Cow for worlds!"

Something in her voice or smile caused Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir to feel slightly cross. There was an unmistakable air of youth about this "old maid"—a sense of fun and a spirit of enjoyment which were not in 'Muzzy's' composition. And 'Muzzy' straightway got an idea into her head that she was "out of

it, as it were,—that Miss Letitia, Boy and 'Dunny' all understood each other in a manner which she could never grasp, and knew the way to a fairyland where she could never follow. And it was with a touch of snappishness that she said,—

"Well!—if you are going, hadn't you better go? My husband will probably be coming in here soon,—and he might perhaps make some objection to Boy's leaving——"

"Oh, I won't run the risk of *that*!" answered Miss Leslie quickly. "Come along, Boy!—say good-bye to Mother!"

Holding his 'Cow' with one hand to his breast, Boy raised his pretty little face to be kissed again.

"Goo' bye, Muzzy dee-ar!" he murmured—"'Ope Dads better soon! Kiss Dads for Boy!"

This was his parting message to the drunkard in the next room,—and having uttered it, he drew a long breath as of one who prepares to plunge into unknown seas, and resigned himself to 'Kiss-Letty,' who led him gently along, accommodating her graceful swift step to his toddling movements, through the hall and outside to her brougham, where the footman in attendance, smiling broadly at the sight of Boy, lifted the little fellow in, and seated him cosily on the soft cushions. Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir and the servant Gerty watched his departure from the house door.

"I will take every care of him!" called Miss

Letitia, as she followed her small guest into her carriage—"Don't be at all anxious!"

She waved her hand,—the footman shut the door, and mounted the box,—and in another minute the smart little equipage had turned the corner of Hereford Square and disappeared. Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir remained for a few seconds on the steps of her house, airing herself largely, and patronising with a casual glance the clear blue of the afternoon sky.

"What a vain old woman that Miss Leslie is!" she remarked to Gerty—"Really she tries to pass herself off as about thirty!"

Gerty sniffed, as usual.

"Oh, I don't think so, 'm!" she said—"I don't think she tries to pass herself off as anything, 'm! And I wouldn't never call her vain. She's just the real lady, every inch of her, and of course she can't help herself lookin' nice. And what a mercy it is for Master Boy to be took away just now!—for I didn't like to mention it before, 'm, but I don't know what we're goin' to do with the Cap'en,—he's goin' on worse than ever,—an he's bin an' torn nearly every mossel of his clothes off,—an' a puffeckly disgraceful sight he is, 'm, lyin' sprawled on the floor a-playin' 'patience'!"

CHAPTER III

MISS LETITIA'S house, her "great big house," as Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir had expansively described it to Boy, was situated on the sunniest side of Hans Place. It was tastefully built, and all the window-ledges had floral boxes delightfully arranged with flowers growing in pots and hanging baskets, over which on warm bright days spacious crimson-and-white awnings stretched forth their protective shade, giving the house-front quite a gay and foreign effect. The door was white, and a highly-polished brass knocker glinted in the sunshine with an almost knowing wink as much as to say—"Use me—And you shall see—Hospitalitee!" When Miss Letty's brougham drove up, however, this same knowing knocker was not called into requisition, for the butler had heard the approaching wheels, and had seen the approaching trotting roans through a little spy-window of his own in the hall, so that before Miss Letty had stepped from the vehicle and had "jumped" her small visitor out also, the door was opened and the butler himself stood, a sedate figure of civil welcome on the threshold. Without betraying himself by so much

as a profane smile, this dignitary of the household accepted the Cow and the brown paper parcel which constituted all Boy's belongings. He took them, so to speak, to his manly bosom, and then, waving away the carriage, coachman, footman and horses with a slight yet stately gesture, he shut the house door and followed his "lady" and the "young gentleman" through the hall into a room which beamed with light, warmth and elegance,—Miss Letty's morning-room or boudoir—where, with undisturbed serenity he set the Cow on the table between a cabinet portrait of Mr. Balfour and a small bronze statuette of Mercury. The Cow looked rather out of place there, but it did not matter.

"Will you take tea, Madam?" he asked, in a voice rendered mellifluous by the constant and careful practice of domestic gentleness.

"No, thank you, Plimpton," replied Miss Letty cheerfully; "we have had tea. Just ring the bell for Margaret, will you?"

Plimpton bowed, and withdrew, not forgetting to deposit the brown paper parcel on a chair as he made his exit. Boy stood speechless, gazing round him in a state of utter bewilderment, and only nolding to any sense of reality in things by keeping close to "Kiss-Letty," and for the further relief of his mind glancing occasionally at the familiar "Dunny," who presented the appearance of grazing luxuriously on an embroidered velvet table-cloth. Instinctively

aware of the little fellow's sudden shyness and touch of fear, Miss Letty did not allow him to remain long oppressed by his vague trouble. Kneeling down beside him, she took off his hat, pulled him out of his tiny overcoat, and kissed his little fat cheeks heartily.

"Now you are at home with Kiss-Letty," she said, smiling straight into his big innocent blue eyes,—"aren't you?"

Boy's breath came and went quickly—his heart beat hard. He lifted one dumpy hand and dubiously inserted a forefinger through the loops of Miss Letty's ever-convenient neck-chain. Then he smiled with responsive sweetness into the kind face so close to his own.

"'Ess," he murmured very softly, "Boy wiz Kiss-Letty! But me feels awfoo' funny!"

Miss Letitia laughed and kissed him again.

"Feels awfoo' funny, do you?" she echoed. "Oh, but I feel just the same, Boy! It's awfoo' funny for me to have you here all to myself, don't you think so?"

Boy's smile broadened—he began to chuckle,—there was the glimmering perception of a joke somewhere in his brain. Just at that moment a comfortable-looking woman in a neat black dress, with a smart white apron, entered, and to her Miss Letty turned.

"This is the dear little fellow I told you about, Margaret," she said, "the only son of the D'Arcy-

Muirs. Master Boy he is called. Boy, will you say 'how do you do' to Margaret?"

Boy looked up. He was easier in his mind now and felt much more at home.

"How do, Margit?" he said cheerfully. "Me tum to stay wiz Kiss-Letty."

"Bless the wee laddie!" exclaimed Margaret in the broad soft accent of Inverness, of which lovely town she was a proud native; and down she flopped on her knees, already the willing worshipper of one small child's winsomeness. "And a grand time ye'll have of it, I'm thinking, if ye're as good as ye're bonnie! Come away wi' me now and I'll wash ye'r bit handies and put on anither suit," for her quick eye had perceived the brown paper parcel while her quick mind had guessed its contents. "And what time will he be for bed, mem?"

"What time do you go to bed, Boy?" asked Miss Letty, caressing his curls.

"Eight klock!" responded Boy promptly; "Gerty puts me in barf and zen in bed."

Both Miss Leslie and her maid laughed.

"Well, it will be just the same to-night," said 'Kiss-Letty' gaily; "only it will be Margaret instead of Gerty. But it's a long way off eight o'clock,—you go with Margaret now, and she will bring you back to me in the drawing-room, and there you shall see some pictures."

Boy smiled at the prospect,—he was ready for

anything now. He put his hand trustfully in that of Margaret, merely observing in a casual sort of way—

"Dunny tum wiz me."

Margaret looked round enquiringly.

"He means his Cow," explained Miss Letty, taking that animal from its velvet pasture-land and handing it to her maid, who received it quite respectfully. "Just remember, Margaret, will you, that he likes the Cow on his bed! It sleeps with him always."

Mistress and maid exchanged a laughing glance, and then Boy trotted off. Miss Letty watched him slowly stumping up her handsome staircase, holding on to Margaret's hand and chattering all the way, and a sudden haze of tears blinded her sight. What she had missed in her life!—what she had missed! She thought of it with no selfish regret, but only a little aching pain, and even now she stilled that pain with a prayer—a prayer that though God had not seen fit to bless her with the love of husband or children she might still be of use in the world,—of use perchance if only to shield and benefit this one little human life of Boy's which had attracted so much of her interest and affection. And with this thought, dismissing her tears, she went up to her own room, changed her walking dress for a graceful tea-gown of black Chantilly lace which clothed her slender figure with becoming ease and dignity, and went into her drawing-room, where, near the French window which opened into a beautiful conservatory,

stood a bluff, big gentleman with a white moustache, chirruping tenderly to a plump bullfinch, which made no secret of the infinite surprise it felt at such strange attempts to imitate melodious warbling. Miss Leslie uttered a low exclamation of pleasure.

"Why, Dick," she said, "this is delightful! I thought you had gone abroad?"

"So I was going," responded Dick—otherwise Major Desmond, advancing to take Miss Letty's outstretched hand and raise it gallantly to his lips,—"but just as I was about to start, I read in the newspapers of a fellow—a man who was once in my regiment—who had got insulted by a dirty ragamuffin of a chap in the Custom-house on the French frontier,—and I said to myself—'What!—am I going out of England to be treated as if I were a thief, and have my portmanteau searched by a Frenchy? No!—as an English officer I won't submit to it! I will stay at home!' It was a sudden resolution. You know I'm a fellow to make sudden resolutions, am't I, Letty? Well, give you my word, I never looked upon Custom-house regulations in the same light as I do now! Come to think of it, you know, directly we leave our own shores we're treated like thieves and rascals by all the foreigners,—and why should we expose ourselves to it? Eh? I say *why?*"

Miss Leslie laughed.

"Well, I'm sure *I* don't know why," she answered. "Only I rather wonder you never thought of all this

before. You have always gone abroad some time in the year, you know."

The Major pulled his white moustache thoughtfully. "Yes, I have," he admitted. "And why the devil—I beg your pardon!—I have done it I can't imagine. England's good enough for anybody. There's too much gadding about everywhere nowadays. And the world seems to me to shrink in consequence. Shrink! by Jove!—it's no bigger than a billiard ball!"

Miss Letty smiled, and said "Sweet!" to her bullfinch, which straightway warbled with delightful inaccuracy the quaint air of "The Whistling Coon."

"Bravo! Bravo!" exclaimed Major Desmond, after listening attentively to the little bird's performance. "Now why the chap couldn't do that for me I can't understand. I have been chirruping to him till my tongue aches—and couldn't get a note out of him. Only a wink. You just say 'sweet' and off he starts. Well, and what have you been doing with yourself, Letty? You look very fit."

"Oh, I'm always 'fit' as you call it," said Miss Leslie placidly. "I live the same quiet life month after month, you know, and I suppose it's scarcely possible for anything to go very wrong with me. I have passed through my storm and stress. The days go by now all in the same even, monotonous way."

Major Desmond took two or three turns up and down the room.

"Well, if you find it even and monotonous to be

doing good all your time," he observed, "I can only say that I wish a few more people would indulge in monotony! But don't you mean to have a change?"

"Oh, I have provided a little distraction for myself," said Miss Letty, smiling demurely; "I have got a young man to stay with me for a few days."

"Young man!" exclaimed the Major. "Well, upon my word——" here he stopped short, for at that moment Boy, attired in his best suit of white flannel, his face shining with recent ablutions, and his golden hair brushed into a shining aureole of curls round his brow, trotted into the room with a cheerful confidence and assertiveness quite wonderful to see.

"Ullo, Major!" he exclaimed: "Zoo tum to see Boy?"

Major Desmond rose to the occasion at once.

"Of course!" he said, and lifting Boy in his arms he set him on his broad shoulder. "Of course I have come to see you! Impossible to keep away knowing you to be here!"

Boy chuckled.

"Me tum to stay wiz Kiss-Letty," he announced.

"So I perceive," replied the Major—and turning to Miss Leslie he said, "This is the young man, eh, Letty? Well, however did you manage to get hold of him?"

"I will tell you all about it at dinner," she answered in a low tone. "You will stay and dine?"

"With pleasure—in fact I hoped you would ask me," responded the Major frankly; "I'm sick of club food."

Boy from his lifted position on the Major's shoulder had been quietly surveying everything in the room. He now pointed to a copy of Burne-Jones's "Golden Stair."

"Pitty ladies," he remarked.

"Yes," agreed Major Desmond, "very pitty! All so good and sweet and lovely, aren't they, Boy? Each one sweeter, gooder, lovelier as they come,—and all so full of pleasant thoughts that they have almost grown alike. One ideal of goodness taking many forms!"

He spoke to himself now and not to Boy—and his eyes rested musingly on Miss Letty. She was just setting a large vase of roses on the grand piano. She looked from his distance a very gentle, fragile lady—dainty and elegant too—almost young,

"Kiss-Letty wiz ze roses," observed Boy.

"Just so!" agreed the Major, "and that is where she always is, Boy! Roses mean everything that is good and sweet and wholesome, and I should not wonder if 'Kiss-Letty' was not something of a rose itself in her way!"

"Oh, Dick!" expostulated Miss Letty, "how can you talk such nonsense to the child! What flattery to an old woman like me!"

"Boy doesn't know whether I'm talking nonsense

or the utmost wisdom," responded the Major undauntedly. "And as I have often told you, you will never be old to me, Letty. You are the best friend I ever had, and if friends are not the roses of life, I should like to know what flowers they do represent! And what I have said before, I say again, that I'm ready to marry you to-morrow if you'll have me."

"Oh, dear me!" sighed Miss Leslie, with a little tremulous laugh. "Just think! Saying such a thing before Boy!"

"Boy! I guarantee he doesn't understand a word I have been talking about. Eh, Boy? Do you know what I have been saying to 'Kiss-Letty'?"

Boy looked down at him with a profound air of cherubic wisdom.

"Wants marry Kiss-Letty 'morrow if 'ave me," he said solemnly.

And then Major Desmond had one of his alarming laughs,—a laugh which threatened to dislodge Boy altogether from his position and throw him headlong on the floor. Miss Letty laughed too, but more gently, and on her pale cheeks there was a rosy tinge suggestive of a blush.

"Well, well!" said the Major, recovering from his hilarity at last,—"Boy is not such a fool as he looks, evidently! There, Letty, I won't tease you any more. But you are very obstinate, you know,—yes, you are! What does Longfellow say?—

'Trust no future, howe'er pleasant,
Let the dead past bury its dead:
Act, act, in the living present,
Heart within and God o'erhead.'

That's wholesome stuff, Letty. I like Longfellow because he is always straight. Some poets go giggetting about in all sorts of dark corners and pop out suddenly upon you with a fire-cracker of a verse which you can't understand a bit, because all the meaning fizzles out while you are looking at it,—but Longfellow!—'Let the dead past bury its dead.' That's sense, Letty. And 'Act, act in the living present.' Why, that's sense too. And why don't you do it?"

"I think I try to do it," answered Miss Letty quietly; "I like to be useful wherever I go. But for me there is no dead past, as you know,—it lives always with me and makes the best and sweetest part of the present."

"There, I suppose I've been putting my foot in it again!" muttered Major Desmond, somewhat disconsolately. "You know I never meant to suggest that you did not do all the good you could and more than is necessary in your life, but what I see in Longfellow's line is that you should 'act, act in the living present' for yourself, Letty. For yourself—make yourself happy, as well as others—make *me* happy! Now, wouldn't that be a praiseworthy deed?"

"Not at all," replied Miss Letty, smiling, "for you deserve to be much happier than I could ever make you. You know there are many charming young women you could marry."

"No, I don't know anything of the sort," said the Major decisively. "The young women of the present day are all hussies—brazen-faced hussies, in my opinion. Girls don't blush any more nowadays; men blush for them. No—you're not going to get rid of me in that way, Letty. At my age I'm not going to be such a vain old ass as to go smirking after girls who would only laugh at me behind my back. I don't believe in philandering, but I believe in love—yes, love at all ages and in all seasons—but it must be the real thing and no sham about it." Here he stopped, for Boy was wriggling on his shoulder and showing unmistakable signs of wishing to go free; so he gently set him down. "There you are, little chap!—and there you go—straight for the roses and 'Kiss-Letty'! Lucky rascal!" This as Boy trotted up to Miss Leslie and stretched his short arms caressingly round her soft lace skirts.

"Where's booful pick-shures?" he demanded; "Boy likes pick-shures."

Miss Leslie then bethought herself that she had promised he should see some 'booful pick-shures' when he came into the drawing-room, and turning towards a pile of *éditions de luxe* in large quarto of

famous works such as "Don Quixote," "Idylls of the King," and Dante's "Divina Commedia," she hesitated.

"Which shall I give him, Dick?" she asked the Major.

"Put 'em all on the floor and let him choose for himself," was the reply. "I believe in treating children like lambs and birds—let them frisk and fly about in the fields of general information as they like,—choose their own bits of grass as it were. Now here's a quintessence of brain for you,"— and he lifted four large volumes off the side-table where they generally stood and placed them on the floor—"Come here, Boy! Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes, Tennyson!—Never heard of 'em, did you? No!—but you will probably have the pleasure of making the acquaintance of all four of 'em in a few years. That's where the wonderful immortality of genius comes in,—the dead author is spiritually able to shake hands with and talk to each and every generation which follows him. There is a wonderful secret in the power of expressed thought if we could only fathom it. Now, which one are you going for first?"

Boy sat down on the floor and considered. One or two of the big books he opened cautiously and looked in as though expecting to see some strange living object inside,—then he shut them quickly, smiling mysteriously to himself the while. Then in the same doubtful way he peeped into the second volume of Dante entitled "Paradiso"—and lo! a picture

of angels ascending and descending—one of Doré's most wonderful conceptions of forms of light portrayed in a dazzling atmosphere,—and his blue eyes sparkled—he opened the book wider and wider—till the whole page burst upon his view, whereupon he curled down closer still and stared silently. Miss Letty seated herself in a low chair, and took out some dainty embroidery, and while her swift needle went in and out with a bright-coloured silk behind it, which wove a flower as it moved, she watched the little fellow, and Major Desmond sitting opposite to her did the same. The bullfinch began a scrap of his 'aria' but broke off to preen his wing,—and there was a silence in the pretty room while Boy's innocent little face drooped in a rapture over the pictured scene of heavenly glory. Not a word did he utter,—but merely drew a long breath like a sigh, and his eyes darkened with an expression of wistful gravity. Then he turned over a few more pages and came upon that most exquisite "Cross" of Doré's imagination, where the dying Saviour of the world hangs crucified, but is surrounded at every point by angels. This seemed to fascinate him more than the other, and he remained absorbed for many minutes, enrapt and speechless. Some unaccountable influence held Miss Leslie and her old friend Dick Desmond silent too. The thoughts of both were very busy. The Major had a secret in his soul which, had he declared it, would have well-nigh killed Letitia Leslie,—he

knew that the man she had loved, and whose memory she honoured with such faithful devotion, had been nothing but a heartless scamp, who in an unguarded moment had avowed to him, Major Desmond, that he was going to throw over Letty when he got back from India, as he was 'on' with a much prettier and wealthier woman; but he had never 'got back from India' to carry out his intention—death had seized him in the heyday of his career, and Letty believed he had died loving her, and her only. Who would have undeceived her? Who would have poisoned the faith of that simple trusting heart? Not Dick Desmond certainly; though he had himself loved her for nearly twenty years, and being of a steadfast nature had found it impossible to love any one else. And he was more content to have her as a friend than to have the most charming 'other woman' as a wife. And he had jogged on quietly till now—well, now he was fifty, and Letty was forty-five.

"We're getting on—by Jove, yes!—we're getting on!" mused Dick. "And just think what that dead rascal out in India has cost us! Our very lives! All sacrificed! Well, never mind!—I would not spoil Letty's belief in her sweetheart for the world."

And yet he could not help feeling it to be a trifle 'hard,' as he felt the charm of Letty's quiet presence, and saw Boy bending over Doré's picture of the "Cross."

"If—if she would have had me, we might have had

a child of our own like that," he mused dolefully; "and as it is, the poor little chap has got a drunken beast for a father and a slovenly fool for a mother! Well, well—God arranges things in a queer way, and I must say, without irreverence, it doesn't seem at all a clear or a just way to me. Why the innocent should suffer for the guilty (and they always do) is a mystery."

Letty, meanwhile, was thinking too. Such sweet and holy thoughts!—thoughts of her dead lover,—her 'brave, true Harry,' as she was wont to call him in her own mind—a mind which was as white and pure as the 'Taj-Mahal,' and which enshrined this same 'Harry' in its midst as a heroic figure of stately splendour and godlike honour. No man was ever endowed by woman with more virtues than Letty gave to her dead betrothed, and her faith in him was so perfect that she had become content with her loneliness because she felt that it was only for a little while,—that soon she and her beloved would meet again never to part. Is it impossible to believe that the steadfast faith and love of a good woman may uplift the departed spirit of an unworthy man out of an uttermost Hell by its force and purity? Surely in these days, when we are discovering what marvellous properties there are in simple light, and the passing of sound through space, it would be foolish to deny the probability of noble Thought radiating to unmeasured distances, and affecting for good those

who are gone from us, whom we loved on earth,—and whose present state and form of life we are not as yet permitted to behold. Anyway, whatever wonders lie hidden in waiting for us behind Death's dark curtain, it may be conceded that the unfaithful soul of the man she loved was in no wise injured by Miss Letty's remembering tenderness and prayers, but rather strengthened and sustained. She was touched just now by Boy's admiration of the pictured angels,—and to her always thoughtful mind there was something quaint in the spectacle of the little wondering fellow bending over the abstruse Great Poem of Italy which arose to life and being through the poet's own Great Wrong. Little did the enemies of Dante dream that their names would be committed to lasting execration in a Hell so immortal as the 'Inferno,'—though it is to be deplored that so supreme a writer should have thought it worth his while to honour, by handing down to posterity, the names of those who were as nobodies compared with himself. However he, like other old-world poets, was not permitted to see his fate beyond his own lifetime. We are wiser in our generation. We know that the more an author's work is publicly praised the more likely it is to die quickly and immediately,—and those who desire their thoughts to last, and to carry weight with future generations, should pray for the condemnation of their present compeers in order to be in tune with the slow but steady pulse-beat of Fame. One has

only to look back through a few centuries to see the list of the Despised who are now become the Glorious —and a study of contemporary critics on the works of Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens, is a very wholesome lesson to the untried writer of books who is afraid of the little acrimonies of Fleet Street. To lead the world one must first be crucified,—this is the chief lesson of practical Christianity.

"Rather curious," said Major Desmond at last, nodding towards Boy, and speaking softly as if he were in church, "how he seems to like those fanciful things!"

Miss Letty smiled.

"Boy!"

Boy looked up with a start.

"Do you like the picture-book?"

Boy gave no answer in words. He merely nodded and placed one dumpy hand on the "Cross of Angels," to keep the place. Suddenly, however, he found voice. He had turned over a few more pages, though still careful not to lose the picture he had selected as his favourite, when he stopped and exclaimed breathlessly,—

"Boy bin there!"

The Major, with remarkable alertness, went down on the floor beside him and looked over his golden head.

"Boy been there! Nonsense! What! In that wonderful garden, with all those flowers and trees

and lovely angels flying about! Boy couldn't get there if he tried!"

Boy looked at him with solemnly reproachful eyes.

"Tell 'oo Boy bin there," he repeated. "Boy seen f'owers and boo'ful people! Boy knows *vezy* well about it!"

The Major became interested.

"Oh, all right!—I don't wish to contradict you, little chappie!" he said with a cheery and confidential air,—"But when were you there last, eh?"

Boy considered—his rosy lips tightened, and his fair brows puckered in a frown of mental puzzlement.

"Me dunno," he replied at last: "long, long time 'go—awfoo' long!" and he gave a deep sigh. "Dunno 'ow long—" here he studied the picture again with an approving air of familiarity. "But Boy 'members it;—pitty p'ace,—pitty f'owers,—all bwight,—awfoo' bwight!—'ess! me 'members it!"

The Major got up from his knees, dusted his trousers, and looked quizzically at Miss Letty.

"Odd little rascal," he observed, *sotto voce*. "Doesn't know a bit what he is jabbering about!"

Miss Letty's soft blue eyes rested on the child thoughtfully.

"I'm not sure about that, Dick," she said. "We are rather arrogant, we old worldly-wise people, in our estimate of children;—Boy *may* remember where he came from, and the imagination of a great artist may have recalled to him a true reality."

Her voice was very sweet,—her face expressed a faith and hope which made it beautiful; and Dick Desmond, in his quick, impulsive fashion, caught one of her little white hands and raised it to his lips with all the gallant grace of a soldier and a gentleman.

"God bless you, Letty!" he said heartily; "I know very well where *you* came from!—and I don't want any picture but yourself to remind me of the fact!"

CHAPTER IV

THAT evening, after Boy had gone to bed, Miss Leslie and the Major discussed the possibilities of his future with great and affectionate interest.

"Of course," said Desmond, "it is a splendid chance for the boy,—but, Letty, that is just the very reason that I am afraid he will not be allowed to have it. The affairs of humanity are arranged in a very curiously jumbled-up fashion, and I have always found that when some specially good luck appears about to favour a deserving person, something unfavourable comes in the way and prevents him getting it. And Fortune frequently showers her choicest gifts on the most unworthy scoundrels, male and female, that burden this earth's surface. It's odd—it's unfair, but it's true."

"Not always," said Miss Leslie, gently. "You really must not get into the habit of looking on the worst side of life, Dick."

"I won't," responded the Major promptly—"at least, not when you're looking at me. Out of your sight I can do as I like!"

Miss Letty laughed. Then she returned to the chief subject of interest.

"You see," she said, "it is not as if the D'Arcy-Muirs were rich and had plenty of opportunities for their son's advance in life. They certainly have enough to live comfortably on, if they are frugal and careful, but the man is so incorrigible——"

"And the woman," put in Major Desmond.

"Well, yes—she too is incorrigible in another way,—but after all slovenliness can scarcely be called a sin."

"I think it can," said the Major emphatically. "A slovenly woman is an eyesore and creates discord and discomfort by her very appearance. She is a walking offence. And when slovenliness is combined with obstinacy,—by Jove, Letty!—I tell you pigs going the wrong way home are easy driving compared to Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir!"

"Yes, I know!" and for a moment Miss Leslie's even brows puckered in a little vexed line. "And her obstinacy is of such a strange kind,—all about the merest trifles! She argues on the question of a teacup or a duster to the extreme verge of silliness, but in important matters, such as the health or well-being of her husband—or of Boy—she lets everything go to pieces without a word of protest!"

"Delightful creature!" murmured the Major, sipping his glass of port wine with a relish: they were at dessert, and he was very comfortable,—pleased

with the elegance of the table, which glistened with old silver, delicate glass, and tastefully arranged flowers,—and still more pleased with the grace and kindness of his gentle hostess,—"I remember her before Jim married her. A handsome large creature with a slow smile,—one of those smiles which begin in the exact middle of the lips, spread to the corners and gradually widen all over the face,—an indiarubber smile I call it,—but the men who took to her in her young days used to rave over her smile, and one idiot said she had 'magnificent maternal brows like the Niobe in Florence.' Good old Niobe! Yes, Letty,—there are a certain set of fellows who always lose their heads on large women,—the larger the better, give you my word! They never consider that the large girl will become a larger matron, and unless attacked by a wasting disease (which heaven forfend) will naturally grow larger every year. And I tell you, Letty, there is nothing in the world that kills a romantic passion so surely and hopelessly as Fat! Ah, you may laugh!—but it is a painful truth. Poetry—moonlight—music—kisses—all that pleasant stuff and nonsense melt before Fat. I have never met a man yet who was in love with a fat, really fat woman! And if a slim girl marries and gets fat in the years to come, her husband, poor chap, may deplore it,—deeply deplore it—but it's very distressing—he cannot help it—his romance dies under it. Dies utterly! Ah! We're weak creatures, we men, we

cannot stand Fat. We like plumpness,—oh yes! We like round rosy curves and dimples, but not actual Fat. Now, Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir will become—indeed has become Fat."

"Dear me!" and Miss Leslie laughed, "you really are quite eloquent, Dick! I never heard you go on in this way before. Poor Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir! She really has no alternative——"

"No alternative but to become Fat?" enquired the Major, solemnly glaring over his port wine.

"Now you know I don't mean it in that way," laughed Miss Leslie. "You really are incorrigible! What I wished to point out was, that when a woman finds that her husband doesn't care a bit how she looks or what she wears, she is apt to become careless."

"It doesn't follow that because a man is a churl a woman should lose her self-respect," said the Major. "Surely she should take a pride in being clean and looking as well as she can for her own sake. Then in this particular case there is Boy."

"Yes—there is Boy," agreed Miss Letty meditatively. "And he certainly does notice things."

"Notice things? I should think he does! He is always noticing. He notices his mother's untidiness, and he notices his father's disgracefulness. If I were Jim D'Arcy-Muir I should be ashamed to meet that little chap's eyes."

Miss Letty sighed.

"Do you think," she asked after a pause, "they will let me have him?"

The Major considered,—and for some minutes sat twirling the ends of his white moustache reflectively.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Letty, I don't," he said at last,—"I don't believe they will for a moment. Some parents would refuse your offer on account of their love and affection for the child, and their own natural desire not to part with him. That will not be the D'Arcy-Muirs' reason. They will simply argue that you are trying to 'patronise' them. It will be exactly like their muddled minds to put it that way. They will say, 'She thinks we are going to put our son under obligations to her for her money.' And though they conduct themselves like pigs they think a great deal of themselves in a 'county-family' fashion. No, Letty—I'm afraid you won't get a chance of doing any good in that quarter. But if you like I will take soundings—that is, I will suggest the idea of such a thing and see how they take it. What do you say?"

"Oh, I wish you would!" said Miss Lettie earnestly. "You see you know Captain D'Arcy-Muir——"

"Well, in a way,—yes, I know him in a way," corrected the Major; "I used to know him better than I do now. He was never in my regiment, thank the Lord! But I will try to get hold of him in a sober moment, and see what can be done. But I don't give out any hopes of him."

"Oh, Dick!" sighed Miss Letty.

"Well, I shall be very sorry for your disappointment, Letty,—very sorry—and sorrier still for the little chap, for I think his life literally hangs on the balance of this chance. If he is not allowed to take it, all the worse for him,—he will come to no good, I fear."

"Don't say that!" pleaded Miss Leslie, with pain in her voice; "don't say that!"

"All right, I won't say it," said the Major, expressing however in his face and tone of voice that he would probably think it all the same. "But the world is a bad place to fight in if you are not thoroughly well equipped for the battle. God made the world, so we are told, but I doubt whether He wished it to be quite as overcrowded as it is just now. All the professions—all the trades—all the arts—overdone! Army no go,—Navy no go. If you are a soldier and get any chance of facing fire, you know just what your reward is likely to be, unless you are a Kitchener. You may get a V.C., and after that the workhouse, like some of the Crimean heroes. And in the Navy you get literally nothing but very poor pay. The best thing for a man now is to be an explorer, and even when you are that, the world cannot be persuaded to believe that you have explored anything, or been anywhere. You have simply been sitting at home and reading up!" He laughed, and then went on, "If you get Boy what are you going to do with him?"

"I shall see what he likes to do best himself," said Letty.

"At present he likes to hug you and see 'pick-shures' of heavenly places," said the Major. "That's a bad sign, Letty! Woman and Art spells ruin like theatrical speculation! Well! Come and have a game of chess with me before I go home to my lonely bachelor rooms;—it is really too bad of you to make a sour old man of me in this way!"

Miss Leslie laughed heartily.

"No one will ever call you a sour old man, Dick," she said as she rose from the table. "You are the most genial and generous-hearted fellow I know."

"Then why won't you have me?" pleaded Desmond.

"Oh, you know why," said Letty. "What is the use of going over it all again?"

"Going over it all—yes—I know!" said the Major dismally. "You have got it into your head that if you were to marry me, and that then afterwards we died—as we shall do—and went to Heaven—which is a question—you would find your Harry up there in the shape of a stern reproving angel, ready to scold you for having a little happiness and sympathy on earth when he was not there. Now, if things are to be arranged in that way, some folks will be in awful trouble. The ladies who have had several husbands,—the husbands who have had several wives,—stern reproving angels all round,—good gracious! What a

row there will be! Fact is fact, Letty,—there cannot possibly be peace in Heaven under such circumstances!"

"Do stop talking such nonsense," said Miss Leslie, still laughing. "Really I begin to wish you had gone abroad after all!"

"No, you don't," said Dick confidently, as he followed her into the drawing-room. "You are pleased to see me, you know you are! Hullo! Here's Margaret. What's up? Something wrong with Boy?"

"Oh no, sir," said Margaret, who had just entered the room; "but I thought perhaps Miss Leslie would like to see him asleep. He is just the bonniest wee bairnie!"

"Oh, I must go and look at him!" said Miss Letty eagerly. "Will you come too, Dick?"

The Major assented with alacrity, and they followed Margaret upstairs, treading softly and on tiptoe as they entered the pretty airy room selected for Boy's slumbers. It was a large room, and one corner of it was occupied by the big bed allotted to Margaret. In an arched recess, draped with white muslin, was a smaller and daintier couch,—and here Boy lay in his first sleep, his fair curls tossed on the pillow, his round soft face rosy with warmth and health, his pretty mouth slightly parted in a smile. Miss Leslie bent over him tenderly and kissed his forehead,—Major Desmond looked on in contemplative and

somewhat awed silence. Presently he noticed a piece string tied to the little fellow's wrist. Pointing to it he whispered solemnly,

"What's that?"

Margaret smiled.

"Oh, he just begged me to get him a bit of string," she said. "He said he always had to fasten his Cow up at night lest it should run away!" Margaret laughed. "Bless the wee lad! And there you see is the Cow at the foot of the bed, and he has tied it to the string in that way himself!"

"Good gracious me!" said the Major, staring, "I never heard of such a thing in my life! And the Cow can't run away! Lucky Cow!"

Boy stirred in his sleep and smiled. A slight movement of the chubby wrist to which the beloved "Dunny" was tied caused it to wag its movable head automatically, and for a moment it looked quite a sentient thing nodding wisely over unexpressed and inexpressible pastoral problems.

"Come away," then said Miss Letty gently. "We shall wake him if we remain any longer."

"Yes," said the Major dreamily, "we shall wake him! And then the Cow might bolt, or take to tossing somebody on its horns, which would be very alarming! God bless my soul! What a little chap it is! Beginning to look after a cow at his time of life!—a budding farmer, upon my word! Letty, Australia is the place for him,—a wild prairie

and cattle, you know,—he is evidently a born rancher!"

Letty laughed, and they left the room together. Margaret watched them as they went downstairs, and gave a little regretful sigh.

"Poor dear Miss Letty!" she thought. "The sweetest lady that ever lived, and no man has ever been wise enough to find it out and marry her."

She bent over Boy's bed and carefully adjusted the coverlet to keep him warm, then lowering the light, left him sleeping peacefully with "Dunny" on guard.

CHAPTER V

IT is a trite axiom, but no less true than trite, that we are always happiest when we are most unconscious of happiness,—when the simple fact of mere existence is enough for us,—when we do not know how, or when, or where the causes for our pleasure come in, and when we are content to live as the birds and flowers live, just for the one day's innocent delight, untroubled by any thoughts concerning the past or future. This is a state of mind which is generally supposed to vanish with early youth, though there are some few peculiarly endowed natures, sufficiently well poised, and confident of the flowing in of eternal goodness everywhere, to be serenely joyous with all the trust of a little child to the very extreme of old age. But even with men and women not so fortunately situated the days when they were happy without knowing it remain put away in their memories as the sweetest time of life, and are recalled to them again and again with more or less poignancy, when pain and disappointment, deceit, cruelty, and harshness unwind the rose-coloured veil of romance from persons and things and show

them the world at its worst. Boy, in the house of Miss Letitia Leslie, was just now living the unconscious life, and making for himself such a picture gallery of sweet little souvenirs as were destined to return to him in years to come sharpened with pain, and embittered by a profitless regret. Every morning he rose up to some new and harmless delight, among surroundings of perfect sweetness and peace,—order, cleanliness, kindness, good-humour and cheerfulness were the hourly investiture of the household,—and after he had been with "Kiss-Letty" two or three days Boy began dimly to wonder whether there really was such an individual as "Poo Sing," or such a large lady as "Muzzy," in the world. Not that the little fellow was forgetful of his parents, —but the parents themselves were of so hazy, and vague, and undeterminate a character that the individuality of the servant Gerty was far more real and actual to the infant mind of their son than their distinguished personalities. It is to be feared that Boy would have been but faintly sorry had he been told he was never to see his "kind good Muzzy" any more. This was not Boy's fault by any means; the blame rested entirely with the "kind good Muzzy" herself. And probably if Boy had felt any regrets about it they would have been more for the parting from the "Poo Sing" gentleman who was so often ill. For the delusive notion of chronic illness on the part of "Poo Sing" had got firmly fixed into Boy's little

head,—he felt the situation to be serious,—he was full of a wistful and wondering compassion, and he had a vague idea that his Dads did not get on so well without him. But this he kept to himself. He was for the present perfectly happy, and wished for no more delightful existence than that which he enjoyed in the company of "Kiss-Letty." He was going through some wonderful experiences of life as well. For instance, he was taken for the first time to the Zoo, and had a ride on an elephant,—a ride which filled him with glory and terror. Glory that he could ride an elephant,—for he thought it was entirely his own skill that guided and controlled the huge beast's gentle meanderings along the smoothly rolled paths of the gardens, and terror lest, skilful and powerful though he was, he should fall, deeply humiliated, out of the howdah in which he was proudly seated. Then he was taken to Earl's Court Exhibition, and became so wearied with the wonders there shown to him from all parts of the world,—there were so many wonders —and the world seemed so immense,—that he fell fast asleep while going round a strange pond in a strange boat called a Venetian gondola, and Major Desmond took him up in his arms, and he remembered nothing more till he found himself in his little bed with Margaret tucking him up and making him cosy. Then there were the days when he was not taken out sight-seeing at all, but simply stayed with Miss Letty and accompanied her everywhere, and he was not sure

that he did not like these times best of all. For after his dinner in the middle of the day, and before they went for their drive, "Kiss-Letty" would take him on her knee and tell him the most beautiful and amazing fairy stories,—descriptions of aerial palaces and glittering-winged elves, which fascinated him and kept him in open-mouthed ecstacy,—and somehow or other he learned a good deal out of what he heard. Miss Leslie was not a brilliant woman, but she was distinctly cultured and clever, and she had a way of narrating some of the true histories of the world as though they were graceful fantasies. In this fashion she told Boy of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus,—and ever afterwards the famous navigator remained in Boy's mind as a sort of fairy king who had made a new world. Happy indeed were all those first lessons he received concerning the great and good things done by humanity,—sweet and refining was the influence thus exerted upon him,—and if such peaceful days could have gone on expanding gradually around his life the more that life needed them, who can say what might not have been the beneficial result? But it often seems as if some capricious fate interfered between the soul and its environment; where happiness might be perfect, the particular ingredient of perfection is held back or altogether denied,—and truly there would seem to be no good reason for this. Stoic philosophy would perhaps suggest that the fortunate environment is

held back from the individual in order that he may create it for himself, and mould his own nature in the struggle,—but then it so often happens that this holding back affects the nature that is not qualified either by birth or circumstances to enfranchise itself. A grand environment is frequently bestowed on a low and frivolous character that has not, and never will have, any appreciation of its fortunate position, while all rights, privileges, and advancements are obstinately refused to the soul that would most gladly and greatly have valued them. And so it was fated to be with Boy. The happy days of his visit to Miss Letty came, as all happy days must do, to an end; and one morning, as he sat at breakfast eating a succulent slice of bread-and-jam, he was startled to see "Kiss-Letty's" blue eyes brimming over with tears. Amazing grief and fear took possession of him,—he put down his bread-and-jam and looked pitifully at his kind friend and hostess.

"Zoo kyin', Kiss-Letty," he said: "Where does it hurt oo?"

Miss Letty tried to smile, but only feebly succeeded. She could have answered that "it" hurt her everywhere. "It" was a letter from Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir requesting that Boy might be returned to his home that afternoon. And Miss Letty knew that this peremptory summons meant that her wish to adopt Boy was frustrated and that the cause was lost. She looked tenderly at the sweet little face that was

turned so wistfully to hers, and said gently though with a slight quiver about her lips,—

"Muzzy wants you, darling! I am to take you home to her to-day."

Boy gave no reply. It was the first difficult moral situation of his life, and it was hardly to be wondered at that he found it almost too much for him. The plain fact of the matter was that, however much "Muzzy" wanted him, he did not want "Muzzy." Nor did he at all wish to go home. But he had already a dim consciousness of the awful "must" set over us by human wills, which, unlike God's will, are not always working for good,—and he had a glimmering perception that he was bound to submit to these inferior orders till the time came when he could create his own "must" and abide by it. But he could not put these vague emotions into speech; all he did was to lose his appetite for bread-and-jam and to stare blankly at "Kiss-Letty." She meanwhile put Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir's letter in her pocket, and tried to assume her usual bright and cheerful air, but with very poor success. For in truth she was greatly disappointed,—and when she lifted Boy out of his chair at the table and set him down on the floor with a very fascinating toy in the shape of a 'merry-go-round' moved by clockwork, which however he contemplated this morning with a faint sense of the futility of all earthly pleasures, she was vaguely troubled by presentiments to which

she could give no name. The hours wore on languidly—and it was with a sense of something like relief that she heard a sharp rat-tat-tat at the door, and a minute afterwards Major Desmond's cheery voice in the hall. She went out to meet him, leaving Boy with his toys in her morning-room,—but one glance at his face confirmed all her worst fears.

"It's no go, Letty!" he said regretfully, as he shook hands. "I've done my best. But I'll tell you where the trouble is. It's the woman. I could manage D'Arcy-Muir, but not that stout play-actress. When D'Arcy-Muir is sober he sees clearly enough, and realizes quite well what a capital chance it is for the little chap; but there is no doing anything with his jelly-fish of a wife. She bridles all over with offence at your proposition—says she has her own ideas for Boy's education and future prospects. Nice ideas they are likely to be! Well! It's no use fretting—you must resign yourself to the inevitable, Letty, and give up your pet project."

Miss Letty listened with apparently unmoved composure while he spoke,—then when he had finished she said quietly,—

"Yes, I suppose I must. Of course I cannot press the point. One must not urge separation between mother and child. Oh yes, I must give it up"—this with a little pained smile—"I have had to give

up so many hopes and joys in life that one more disappointment ought not to matter so much, ought it? Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir has written to me—I am to take Boy back this afternoon."

The Major's tender heart was troubled, but he would not offer his friend any consolation,—he knew that the least said the soonest mended in such cases,—and he saw that Miss Letty was just then too vexed and grieved to bear many words even from him. So he went in to Boy, and wound up his clockwork 'merry-go-round' for him, and told him fabulous stories of giants,—giants who, though terrible enough to hold the world in awe, were yet unable to resist the fascinations of "hasty pudding," and killed themselves by eating too much of that delicacy in an unguarded moment. Which remarkable narratives, in their grotesque incongruity, conveyed the true lesson that a strong or giant mind may be frequently destroyed by indulgence in one vice; though Boy was too young to look for morals in fairy legends, and accepted these exciting histories as veracious facts. And so the morning passed pleasantly after all,—though now and then a wistful look came into Boy's eyes, and a shadow crossed the placid fairness of "Kiss-Letty's" brow when either of the two chanced to think of the coming parting from each other. Boy however did not imagine it so much of a parting as Miss Letty knew it would be; he had a firm belief that though he was going home to "Muzzy" he

should still see a great deal of his "Kiss-Letty" all the same. She on the contrary knew enough of Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir's obstinate disposition to be quite certain of the fact that because a hint had been thrown out by Major Desmond as to the advantages of her adopting Boy, she would be forced to see less of him than ever. Strange it is, and in a manner terrible, that the future of a whole life should be suspended thus between two human wills!—the one working for pure beneficence, the other for selfishness, and that the selfish side should win the day! These are mysteries which none can fathom; but it too often happens that a man's career has been decided for good or evil by the amenities or discords of his parents, and their quarrels or agreements as to the manner of his education.

It was with a sad and sinking heart that Miss Leslie took Boy accompanied by the faithful "Dunny" back to the home of his progenitors that afternoon. He had more luggage to carry away than he had arrived with—a brown paper parcel would not hold his numerous toys, nor the pretty little suits of clothes his kind hostess had presented him with. So Major Desmond bought him an astonishingly smart portmanteau, which fairly dazzled him, and into this most of his new things were packed by Margaret, who was sincerely sorry to lose her little charge. The 'merry-go-round,' being a Parisian marvel of clockwork, had a special case of its own, and

"Dunny"!—well, "Dunny" was a privileged Cow, and Boy always carried it in his arms. And thus he returned, Biblically speaking, to the home of his fathers,—the house in Hereford Square, and his large "Muzzy" received him with an almost dramatic effusiveness.

"You poor child!" she exclaimed. "How badly your hair has been brushed! Oh dear!—it's becoming a perfect mop! We must have it cut to-morrow."

Miss Leslie's cheeks reddened slightly.

"Surely you will not have his curls cut yet?" she began.

"My dear Letitia, I know best," said Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir with an irritating air of smiling condescension. "A boy—even a very young boy—looks absurd with long hair. You have been very kind and nice to him, I am sure,—but of course you don't quite understand——"

Miss Leslie sat down opposite her with a curiously quiet air of deliberation.

"I wish to speak to you for a few minutes," she said. "Is your husband at home?"

"No. He has gone into the country for a few days. I am quite lonely!" and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir heaved a lazy smile. "I felt I could not possibly be a day longer without my son in the house."

The extraordinary air of grandiloquence she gave to the words "my son in the house," applied to a child

of barely four years old, would have made Miss Leslie laugh at any other time, but she was too preoccupied just now to even smile.

"I think," she went on in a methodical way—"I think Major Desmond did me the kindness to mention to you and Captain D'Arcy-Muir an idea I had concerning Boy——"

"Oh yes, a most absurd idea," interposed Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, with quite a solemn reproach in her voice. "Pardon me for saying so, Letitia, but I really am surprised at you. A preposterous idea!—to separate my boy from me!"

"You mistake," answered Miss Leslie; "I had no wish to separate you. You would have seen quite as much of Boy as you see now, or as you will see when in the natural course of things you send him to school. My sole desire in the proposition I made, and which I asked Major Desmond to explain, was to benefit your dear little child in every possible way. I am all alone in the world——"

"Yes, I know! So sad!" put in Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir in a tone of commiseration that was almost an insult.

"And I have a large fortune," pursued Miss Letty with unruffled composure: "when my time comes to die, I shall probably leave more than one-hundred-thousand pounds——"

"No! You don't say so! Really, Letitia, you are indeed fortunate! Why ever don't you marry?

There are lots of poor fellows who would only be too delighted."

"We can pass that question," said Miss Leslie patiently. "What I wish to point out to you is that I am what the world calls a fairly wealthy woman, and that if you could see your way to letting me adopt Boy and educate him, everything I possessed would be his at my death."

"Oh, I don't wonder at all," said Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir expansively, "that you have taken such a fancy to my boy! That's quite natural. And really, Letitia, if you don't know how to dispose of your fortune otherwise, I cannot imagine anything more pleasant for you than to make him your heir. But to adopt him for the purpose of educating him according to your notions! Oh dear no! It would never do!"

"If he is not educated according to my notions he will certainly not be my heir," said Miss Letty very firmly. "He is just now at an age when anything can be done with him. Give me leave to take him out of the radius of his father's unfortunate example, and surround him with all that is healthy and good and useful, and I am sure you will not regret it."

"Dear me! I am so sorry for you!" and "Muzzy" smiled blandly; "I feel for you with all my heart, and I quite understand your wish to have Boy! It would be delightful for you, but I cannot possibly hear of it! I am his mother,—I could not part with him under any circumstances whatever!"

"You are quite resolved, then?" and Miss Leslie looked at her steadily.

"Quite! I have my own ideas of education, and I could not possibly allow the slightest interference. My son"—and here she swelled visibly with a sense of her own importance—"will have every chance in life!"

"God grant it!" said Miss Letitia fervently. "No one in the world desires his good more heartily than I do. And if ever I can be of any assistance to him in his career, I will. But for the present I will say good-bye,—both to you—and to him."

"Are you going away?" enquired Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir with but a faint show of interest.

"Yes, I shall go to Scotland for the rest of the summer, and I have arranged to join a party of friends in Egypt this winter. So I shall not be here to interfere"—and Miss Letty smiled rather sadly as she emphasised the word—"with Boy. I hope he will not quite forget me."

"I hope not," said "Muzzy" with bland commiseration. "But of course you know children never remember anything or anybody for long. And what a blessing that is, isn't it?"

Miss Letty made no answer; she was down on the floor kissing Boy.

"Good-bye, darling," she whispered,—"good-bye! I shall not see you for a while, but you will always love me, won't you?"

"Alwiz love 'oo!" murmured Boy earnestly, with a vague sense that he was experiencing a very dreadful emotion which seemed quite to contract his little heart—"Alwiz!" and he threw his chubby arms round Miss Letty's neck and kissed her again and again.

"Dear little man!" she said with almost a half-sob. "Poor little man! God bless you!"

Then she rose, and turning to Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir held out her hand.

"Good-bye!" she said. "If you should ever change your mind about Boy, please let me know at once. I shall be glad to have him at any time between now and till he is seven,—after that it would be no use—as all his first impressions will have taken root too deeply in his nature to be eradicated."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed "Muzzy" with a wide smile. "You are really quite a blue-stocking, Letitia! You talk just like a book of philosophy or degeneration—which is it?—I never can remember! I always wonder what people mean when they try to be philosophic and talk about impressions on the mind! Because of course impressions are always coming and going, you know—nothing ever remains long enough to make a lasting effect."

Miss Letty said no more. It was useless to talk to such a woman about anything but the merest commonplaces. The ins and outs of thought—the strange slight threads of feeling and memory out of which the

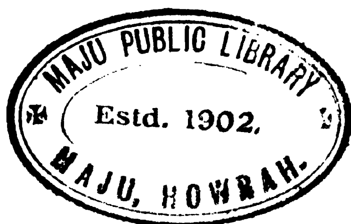
character of a human being is gradually woven like a web,—the psychic influences, the material surroundings, the thousand-and-one things that help to strengthen or to enervate the brain and heart and spirit, all these potentialities were unknown to the bovine female who waxed fat and apathetic out of pure inertia and sloth. She was, as she was fond of announcing, a 'mother,' but her ideas of motherhood consisted merely in feeding Boy on sloppy food which frequently did not agree with him, in dosing him with medicine when he was out of sorts, in dressing him anyhow, and in allowing him to amuse himself as he liked wherever he could, however he could, at all times and in all places dirty or clean. A child of the gutter had the same sort of maternal care. Of order, of time, of refinement, of elegance and sweet cleanliness there was no perception whatever; while the Alpha and Omega of the disordered household was of course "Poo Sing," who rolled in and rolled out as he chose, more or less disgraceful in appearance and conduct at all hours. However, there was no help for it—Miss Letty had held out a rescue, and it had been refused, and there was nothing more to be done but to leave Boy, for the present at any rate, in his unfortunate surroundings. But there were tears in the eyes of the tender-hearted lady when she returned home alone that day, and missed the little face and the gay prattle that had so greatly cheered her loneliness. And after dinner, when the stately Plimpton handed her her cup

of coffee, she was foolish enough to be touched by his solemnly civil presentation to her of a diminutive pair of worn shoes set in orderly fashion on a large silver tray.

"Master Boy left these behind him, my lady," he said,—he always called Miss Letty 'my lady' out of the deep deference existing towards her in his own mind. "They're his *h*old ones." Plimpton was fond of aspirating his h's,—he thought the trick gave an elegant sound to his language.

"Thank you, Plimpton," said Miss Leslie, with a faint smile. "I will send them to his mother in the morning."

But she did not send them to his mother. When she was quite alone, she kissed each little shoe tenderly, and tied them up together in soft silk paper with a band of blue ribbon,—and then, like a fond weak creature, put them under her pillow when she went to bed and cried a little,—then slept and dreamed that her "brave true Harry" was alive and wedded to her, and that Boy was her very own darling, with no other "Muzzy" in the world.



CHAPTER VI

DAYS went on, months went on, years went on, as they have a habit of doing, till Boy arrived at the mature age of nine. Changes had occurred during this period, which slight in themselves were destined to have their lasting effect upon his character and temperament. To begin with, Captain and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir had been compelled, through the force of circumstances, to leave the house in Hereford Square, and give up living in London altogether. The Honourable Captain's means had been considerably straitened through his "little ways," and often and often during occasional flashes of sobriety it would occur to him that Boy was steadily growing, and that what a d——d pity it was that Miss Leslie had not adopted him after all. Once or twice he had broached the subject to his wife, but only to be met by a large placid smile, and the remark—

"Jim, I really am surprised at you! I thought you had more pride. But really you don't seem to mind the idea of your only son being put in the position of a pauper!"

"Don't see where the pauper comes in," growled

the Honourable Jim. "A hundred thousand pounds is surely enough to keep a man from the workhouse. And if that lot of money is going around begging, I don't see why the little chap shouldn't have it. I've nothing to leave him,—why the deuce don't you let the old lady take him and have done with it?"

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, with a lachrymose air of deeply seated injury, "if you are so lost to decency as to wish to part from your own flesh and blood——"

"Oh, hang it all!" burst out the "Honourable" scion of century-condensed aristocracy: "D——n your flesh and blood! Have it your own way! Do as you d——n please! Only don't bother me."

In this way such marital discussions always ended,—and Boy struggled steadily along in growth and being and thought, wholly unconscious of them. He had lost sight of Miss Letty, but truly had not forgotten her—though in the remote village on the sea coast where his father had now elected to dwell in order that he might indulge in his pet vice without undue public comment or observation, he found himself so utterly estranged from all delicate and helpful sympathies as to be almost rendered stunned and stupid. In the first year after he had left London he was taught some desultory lessons by a stolid-faced country wench who passed for being a nursery governess, but whose abilities were chiefly limited to ogling the young sailor and farmer lads

of the place, and inventing new fashions for arranging her coarsely abundant hair. Boy's contempt for her knew no bounds: he would sit and watch her out of the corners of his eyes while she stood before a looking-glass, smirking at her own reflection, and quite unwittingly he developed a curious vein of satire which soon showed itself in some of the questions he put to her and to others. A sad little change had taken place in him—the far-off, beautiful angel look of his countenance had all but vanished, and an expression of dull patience combined with weariness had taken its place. For by this time of course he had found out the true nature of "Poo Sing's" chronic illness, and the knowledge of it had filled him with an inexpressible disgust and shame. Child though he was, he was not too young to feel a sick thrill when he saw his father march into the house at night with the face, voice, and manner of an infuriated ruffian bent on murder. And he no longer sat in a chair innocently murmuring "Poo Sing"—but slunk away from the evil sight, whispering faintly to himself, "Father! Oh, father!" In dark corners of the house, and more often outside the house in a wooded little solitude of pines, where scarcely a bird's wings fluttered to disturb the dark silence, Boy would sit by himself meditating, and occasionally reading—for he had been quick to learn his letters, and study offered as yet no very painful difficulties to him. He was naturally a boy of bright brain and acute perception

—but the brightness had been darkened and the perception blunted by the ever down-pressing weight of home influences brought about by his father's degradation and his mother's indifference. He began to see clearly now that it was not without good cause he had felt sorry for his "Muzzy's" ugliness, for that ugliness was the outcome of her own fault. He used to wander down to the border of the sea, mechanically carrying a tin pail and wooden spade, and there would sit shovelling in sand and shovelling it out again; and while thus engaged would sometimes find there one or two ladies walking with their children—ladies in trim serge skirts, and tidily belted blouses, and neat sailor-hats set gracefully on prettily arranged hair,—and he could not for the life of him understand why his mother should allow her dress to be less orderly than that of the cook, and her general appearance less inviting and odorous than that of the old woman who came round twice a week to sell prawns and shrimps at the door. And so he brooded and brooded—till on one sudden and alarming day the stolid nursery governess was found on his father's knee, with his father's arms clasped round her,—and such an appalling clamour ensued that Boy, who was of course not told the real reason of the disorder, stood terrified and thought every one in the house had gone raving mad, and that he, poor small chap, was left alone in the middle of a howling wilderness. The stolid nursery governess, on being discovered,

had promptly fainted, and lay on the floor with her large feet well upturned and more than an inch of stocking exposed;—the "Honourable" Jim rattled out all his stock of oaths till he was black and blue in the face with impotent swearing, and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir plumping heavily down in the nearest convenient chair, lifted up her voice and wept. And in the middle of her weeping, happening to perceive Boy standing on the threshold of the room, very pale-faced and half paralysed with fright, she caught him up in her arms and exclaimed, "My poor, dear, injured son!" with a wifely and maternal gusto that was more grotesque than impressive. Boy somehow felt that he was being made ridiculous, though he could not have told why. And when the stolid-faced nursery governess had prolonged her fainting fit as much as was desirable and endurable,—when with many grunts and sighs, spasmodic kicks and plunges, she righted herself, so to speak, first into a sitting posture, and then gradually rose to her feet, a tearful martyr to wrongful suspicions, and, with one injured-innocence look of reproach at Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir and a knowing side-wink at the irate and roaring "Jim," left the room and afterwards the house, never to return, Boy lived for many days in a state of deep wonderment, not knowing what to make of it. It was a vast puzzle to his young mind, but he was conscious of a certain advantage to himself in the departure of the ill-used young woman, who had so

casually superintended his few lessons in the intervals of dressing her hair. He was left very much more alone, and took to wandering—"daunering" as the Scotch would say—all about the village and down by the edge of the sea, like a small waif of the world, neglected and astray. He was free to amuse himself as he liked, so he strolled into all sorts of places, dirty and clean, and got his clothes torn and ragged, his hands and face scratched and soiled; and if it chanced that he fell into a mud-puddle or a sea-pool—which he often did—he never thought of telling his mother that he was wet through, because she never noticed it, and he therefore concluded that it did not matter. And he began to grow thin, and wiry, and brown, and unkempt, till there was very little difference in appearance between him and the common boys of the village, who were wont to haunt the sea-shore and pick up stray treasures in the way of weed and shell and wreckage there,—boys with whom he very soon began to fraternise, much to his detriment. They were not bad boys—but their language was brutal, and their manners more so. They called him a "ninny" when he first sought their society, and one big lout beat him on the head for his too sharp discovery of a shilling buried in the sand. But these were trifles; and after proving that he was not afraid of a ducking, or a stand-up fight either, they relented towards him, and allowed him to be an associate of their scavenger pursuits. Thus he learnt new forms

of language and new customs of life, and gradually adopted the lazy, slouching walk of his shore-companions, together with their air of general indifference, only made occasionally piquant by a touch of impudence. Boy began to say sharp things now and then, though his little insolences savoured more of satire than malice. He did not mean to be rude at any time, but a certain vague satisfaction moved him when he found that he could occasionally make an observation which caused his elders to wince, and privately wonder whether their grey hairs were not standing on end. He rather repressed this power, however, and thought a good deal more than he said. He began to consider his mother in a new light,—her ways no longer puzzled him so much as they amused him. It was with almost a humorous condescension that the child sat down obediently to his morning lessons with her,—lessons which she, with much elaboration and importance, had devised for his instruction. Truth to tell, they were very easy samples of learning,—her dense brain was not capable of arranging anything more than the most ordinary forms of study,—and Boy learnt more of the world in an hour's listening to the chat of the fishermen on the quay, than his "Muzzy" could have taught him in a hundred years. There was in particular one old, old man, wrinkled and weather-beaten, whose sole life's business seemed to be to sit on a tar-barrel and smoke his pipe, except

when he gave a hand to help pull in the fishing smacks as they came to shore laden with herring or mackerel. He was known in the place by the nick-name of "Rattling Jack,"—and to him Boy would often go, and with half bold, half shy questions would draw him out to tell stories of the sea, though the old chap was not very fond of harking back to his past life and adventures, and generally preferred to expound short essays on the conduct of life, drawn from his long experience.

"Aye, there y' are," he said on one occasion, when Boy, with some pride, brought for his inspection a beautiful rose-coloured sea-anemone which he had managed to detach from the rocks and carry off in his tin pail. "There y' are, you see! Now ye've made a fellow-creature miserable y' are as 'appy as the day is long! Eh, eh—why for mussy's sake didn't ye leave it on the rocks in the sun with the sea a-washin' it an' the blessin' of the Lord A'mighty on it? They things are jes' like human souls—there they stick on a rock o' faith and hope maybe, jes' wantin' nothin' but to be let alone; and then by-and-by some one comes along that begins to poke at 'em, and pull 'em about, and wake up all their sensitiveness-like—'urt 'em as much as possible, that's the way!—and then they pulls 'em off their rocks and carries 'em off in a mean little tin pail! Ay, ay, ye may call a tin pail whatever ye please—a pile o' money or a pile o' love—it's nought but a tin pail—not a rock with the sun shinin' upon it.

And o' coorse they dies—there ain't no sense in livin' in a tin pail."

These remarks being somewhat profound, were rather beyond Boy's comprehension, but he gathered something of their sense and looked rather wistfully at his sea-trophy.

"Will it die now?" he asked anxiously.

"Av coorse it will! How 'd you like to be off your own blessed rock, and squeeged into a pail? Come now, tell me that! Wouldn't you kick the bucket over?—Hor—hor—hor!" and the old man laughed hoarsely at what he considered a bright and natural witticism—"an' die an' 'ave done with it?"

"I suppose I should," answered Boy meditatively. "What do you do when you die?"

"I ain't done it yet," replied Rattling Jack rather testily. "But I expec' when I 'ave to, I'll do it as well as my betters—stretch out my legs, turn up my toes, shut up my eyes, chuckle-chuckle in my windpipe, and go slick off. There ain't no particular style o' doing it."

Boy stood staring, limp with horror,—Rattling Jack had been so extremely realistic in his description—suiting the action to the word, and the word to the action,—and at the "chuckle-chuckle in my windpipe" he had made such an appalling noise that Boy felt it would be necessary to run for assistance. But the venerable gentleman soon recovered from his histrionic efforts, and refilling his pipe began stuffing the tobacco

well into it with the point of an extremely dirty forefinger.

"Ay, ay, there y' are," he went on. "Now wot are ye goin' to be yerself when yer tries to knock up a riggin' in this wide world? There bain't no place for boys in this old country, but away wiz yer to 'Meriker and Canada. Ask yer father to send ye away to 'Meriker,—there's a chance for ev'ry man to make a million there, an' come back a reg'lar bounder. An' then ye can marry one o' they foine ladies wot's all dress an' no brains. Simper-simper—slish-slish! —ah, they makes me sick, they do! I tell yer," here he turned angrily round upon the astonished boy, "I tell yer they makes me sick, they do! We don't see a-many of 'em 'ere, the Lord be blessed for all 'is mussies, but if ever you goes to Lunnon——"

"I used to live in London," murmured Boy apologetically.

Rattling Jack looked at him in a kind of dull wrath.

"You! You little shaver! Come from Lunnon, do yer? Well, wot in the world is yer doin' 'ere? Now tell me that!" Here lighting his pipe he stuck it well between his yellow teeth, and turned round with a fish-like glare in his eye upon the small boy before him. "Wot are yer doin' 'ere?" he repeated. "Come now, tell me that!"

Boy meditated, finally he said,—

"I'm very sorry I can't tell you. I really don't know."

"Avast there!" said Rattling Jack. "A boy as don't know where 'e is, nor wot 'e is, nor why 'e is, ain't no good as I can see. Chuck it!"

Possibly it may have been from the consideration of these scathing remarks of Rattling Jack that Boy was moved one morning to ask his "Muzzy" a perplexing question, which has often presented itself as the profoundest of problems to most of the world's metaphysicians.

"Mother, what am I?"

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, who had just settled herself comfortably in an arm-chair to hear him read aloud a short summary, prepared by herself, of some of the baldest and prosiest facts of our glorious English history, gazed at him with a bland smile.

"Don't be silly, Boy!"

"I'm not silly," he answered, with a touch of irritation. "I want to know what I really am—I mean, what is the good of me?"

"What is the good of you?" echoed "Muzzy," nodding her large head abstractedly. "Are you not my son?"

"Yes, but I might have been anybody's son, you see," said Boy. "That isn't it at all. I should like to know what I'm going to do with myself."

"Of course you would," replied his mother with comfortable composure. "Very natural, and very

proper. But we can't decide that just now. When you are older perhaps you shall go into the Navy."

Boy's face flushed, and his delicate brows contracted. His mother did not understand him. But he had found out that it was no use arguing with her.

"That's not what I meant," he said, and turned at once to his lessons in resigned patience.

It was strange, he thought, but inevitable, that no one could be found to tell him exactly what he wished most to learn. About God, for instance,—who was that Personage really? He was afraid to ask. He had been told that God had made him, and the world, and everything that was in the world, and he was accustomed to say a little form of prayer to this same God every night at bedtime, and every morning on rising—the servant Gerty at Hereford Square had taught him to do so, and his "Muzzy" had blandly approved of Gerty's religious zeal. But he had no real conception as to Whom he was addressing himself. The sweet old story—the grand story of the selfless Christ, had been told him in a sort of vague and inconsequent manner, but he had not understood it a bit. One of his petitions to Heaven, invented by Gerty, ran thus,—"Dear Jesus, bless father, bless mother, make me a good boy, and save my soul for Heaven, Amen!" But he had no sort of idea what his "soul" was, or why it should be so carefully "saved for Heaven." What was the

good of his soul? And what was Heaven? Often he thought he would ask Rattling Jack,—but he hesitated to do so lest that venerable cynic should empty vials of wrath on his defenceless head for being in such a state of ignorance. And so the days went on, and he was fast becoming used to the companionship of the boy-scavengers on the beach, and the conversation of Rattling Jack, when a sudden and glorious break occurred in the clouds of his dull sky. Major Desmond came down from London unexpectedly to see his father and mother, and to ask that he might be allowed to go to Scotland and stay a whole month with Miss Leslie, at a beautiful place she had taken there for the summer on the fairy shores of Loch Katrine. He was amusing himself by the sea as usual, putting helpless baby-crabs into a glass bottle, when his mother's maid-of-all-work came hurrying down to find him, and seizing him suddenly by the arm, upset the whole crab family all over the sand. But Boy made no remark of either anger or sorrow as he saw his crawling collection scattered in all directions,—they were not the only crabs, he reflected philosophically—there were a good many more in the sea. And when he heard that Major Desmond was waiting to see him, he was very glad, though as a matter of fact he was not quite sure who Major Desmond was, except that he was associated in his mind with an old magic lantern which had fallen out

of repair, and was shut up in a cupboard with the worn-out boots of the household. He ran, however, as fast as his little wiry legs would carry him, moved by curiosity and an eagerness that he could not well explain, but made conscious, by the outcoming aura of pleasurable sensations, that something agreeable was about to happen. He forgot that he was dirty and untidy,—he did not know that he looked neglected —so that he was utterly unaware of the reasons which caused the well-dressed, handsome, burly old gentleman, with the white moustache, to recoil a step or two at sight of him, and exclaim, "Oh Lord!" accompanying the ejaculation with a low whistle. Major Desmond?—of course he remembered him now!—he was the friend of that far-off vision of his childhood, "Kiss-Letty." And rising memories began to send the colour to his face, and the sparkle to his eyes, and the tremulous curve to his lips, as he held out his grimy little hand and said somewhat nervously,—

"How do you do, Major? Has Miss Letty come too?"

The Major recovered from the shock of dismay with which he had at first contemplated the little sea-ragamuffin—and as he caught the look and smile with which Boy accompanied his question he began to breathe again.

"No, she has not come," he replied, taking a grip of Boy's thin shoulder with his strong yet gentle

hand. "She is in Scotland. I am going over there to shoot. And I want to take you with me if your mother will let you come. How would you like to go, eh?"

Boy remained speechless. He could really have cried for joy at the idea—but he had learnt to control his emotions. One of the special "points" of his mother's character was the maternal delight she had in refusing him any very special relaxation—she judged that as "discipline," and used to say it was "a mother's duty" to see that "her son" was not spoilt. So remembering this in time, he only smiled and was silent. Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, looking narrowly at him, smiled also, condescendingly and complacently.

"Dear Boy! He doesn't want to leave me," she said, reverting to her old idea that she had made herself an absolute necessity to his comfort and happiness. "But I really think—yes—I think I should like him to go with you, Major. A little change will do him good—he is growing so fast——"

"Yes, by Jove he is!" agreed Desmond, looking at the little fellow with a doubtful air; "and getting jolly thin on it too! What do you feed him on, eh? Oh, never mind, we won't go into it if you'd rather not. A little knocking round in the heather won't hurt him. Well, ma'am, if you're agreeable I can take him at once—we can reach London this evening and take the mail train up to-morrow."

And so with few words, to Boy's complete amazement, it was all settled. He was told to go and get washed and dressed, and the good-natured maid-of-all-work hearing these instructions, came to him in his little room and scrubbed him down, and helped him into his only decent suit of clothes, still of the "Jack Tar" pattern, and made by a country tailor. The country tailor was the only one who had fitted Boy properly; all his other clothes were stitched together loosely by Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, who had "designed" them, as she said with much pride, and "cut" them, alas! on the following of those designs. A few little shirts and socks were crammed hastily into the very portmanteau Major Desmond had given him so long ago, and the maid-of-all-work perceiving a loose box of toys in a corner, containing she knew not what, put that in also—"for," she muttered to herself, "they'll amuse him on a rainy day, and I've heard it always rains in Scotland." And so before he had time almost to look round, he had said good-bye to his mother,—his father was at the public-house and it was not worth while sending for him,—and was in the train with the Major sitting opposite to him—yes, there they were, flying, rushing, flying along to London at the rate of fifty miles an hour. He could hardly believe it; his head was quite confused with the hurry and surprise of it. He felt a little shy too, and afraid; the pretty confidence of his early days had quite disappeared. He peeped

up every now and then at the Major, and the Major in turn, over the edge of a newspaper, peeped at him.

"By Jove, how the poor little beggar has been allowed to run wild!" thought the good-natured gentleman, whom the passing of years had made more good-natured than ever. "Looks like a ragged wastrel!" Aloud he said, "Boy, old chap, do you know what I'm going to do with you when we get to town?"

Boy smiled trustfully, because the Major looked so cheerful.

"No," he said. "You tell me!"

"I'm going to put you in a mild Turkish bath," pursued the Major. "Know what that is?"

"No!" and Boy laughed.

"Thought not! Well, you'll know before you go to bed!"

Then came a silence, while the Major read his paper and the train rushed on,—and Boy began thinking, or rather trying to think over the rapid and amazing events of the day.

"I wish I'd said good-bye to Rattling Jack," he remarked suddenly.

"Oh, do you? And who the deuce is 'Rattling Jack?'" enquired the Major.

"He is just an old man," replied Boy—"oh, very old! But he is a good talker and he amuses me often. He has seen a great deal of life."

At this observation Major Desmond folded up his

newspaper, laid it flat on his knee with a bang, and stared hard. "Seen a great deal of life!" What an old-fashioned, weird, and preoccupied look the little fellow had, to be sure! And how thin he was, and brown! What would Miss Letty say of him when she saw him? Would she be glad she had not been able to adopt him, or would she be sorry? These thoughts passed like small lightning flashes over the Major's brain, and he gave a short impatient sigh. But so far as he was personally concerned he meant to make the best of it all, and on arriving in London that night he not only fulfilled his intention of seeing Boy through a Turkish bath, but he also took him to a tailor's establishment famous for ready-made clothing, and "rigged him out," as he termed it, with everything that was necessary for the son of a gentleman. And Boy slept soundly in the little room assigned to him at the Major's bachelor flat,—his little limbs, lately encrusted with sea-salt that had almost baked itself into his tender flesh, were soothed and softened and rested by the rubbing and polishing he had received at the Turkish bath,—a rubbing and polishing which by-the-bye he had found intensely amusing and delightful, and he slipped into his new little flannel nightgown with a sense of ease and rest and light-heartedness that he had not felt for many a long day. And in his sleep something that had seemed hard and unchildish in him rolled away for the time being, for when he got up the next morning

and put on his smart little grey travelling suit and cap to match, and his gold curls, rather short, but washed free of the sea-iodine, were glistening with something of their old brightness over his forehead, he looked more like the "Boy" of his babyhood than he had done for months. He was himself conscious of an alteration in his feelings,—Rattling Jack and his scavenger friends had all glided away like a bad dream or a picture painted on a vanishing screen,—his smiles came easily,—his step was brisk and light,—and while at breakfast with the Major, his laugh rang out with almost as much sweetness and freedom as in the old chuckling days of his affection for "Kiss-Letty." And then, when they started for the north by the terrible train known as the "Flying Scotchman," what joy!—what excitement!—what novelty! There was the jolly guard with the strongest of Highland accents—what a splendid fellow he was to be sure! Then there was the other man with the polite countenance and the gold buttons on his coat, who came round respectfully to take orders for luncheon-baskets *en route*,—he was a very agreeable person too, especially when luncheon-time came and the basket with it. Then there were the wonderful picture-papers with which the Major provided him, together with a fascinating little hamper of fruit, and a box of the finest chocolate. What a heavenly journey!—what an almost inspired "rush" it was from London to Edinburgh—a flight as of the gods! And

when Edinburgh was reached, and the Major did not stop there, but took another train on to a place called Callander, where Miss Leslie's elegant landau awaited them, there followed a drive like a dream through scenery that was surely as beautiful as any fabled fairy-land. Crown upon crown of deep purple hills stretched softly away into the evening distance of a golden sky as clear as amber,—glorious trees nodding drowsily under a weight of clustering scarlet berries—trees which the Major told him were called rowans in Scotland and mountain-ash in England,—tufts and hillocks of heather almost blazing like fire in the after-glow of the set sun—and a sweet mysterious noise of rippling water everywhere—the noise of falling "burnies" leaping from rocky heights, and trickling down into deep recesses of coolness and shadow fringed with bracken and fern. And then the first glimpse of Loch Katrine! That exquisite turn of the road which charms the dullest spectator after passing the Trossachs Hotel,—with Ellen's Isle standing like a jewel on the shining breast of the peaceful water! Boy's long pent-up love of the beautiful found vent here in a cry of ecstacy, and he stood up on the seat of the carriage to take in the whole of the matchless panorama. His eyes sparkled,—his little face shone with joy and animation; and seeing how he had almost smiled himself into the real child he was again, the kindly Major was more satisfied, and did not feel so much nervous

dread of what Miss Letty might say, when the carriage turned suddenly round into a fine avenue of silvery birches and pine, and bowled up to the door of a long wide house, covered with roses, and set on a terrace overlooking the Loch, where stood the gentle lady upon whom the passing of time had scarcely left a perceptible trace—Miss Letty, as serene and graceful as ever, with the same beneficent look of welcome and soft dove-like glance of eye. At sight of her, Boy let himself go altogether, and flinging reserve and timidity to the winds sprang into her ready arms, and hugged her tight, with a strong inclination to cry, so deeply was he excited. Miss Letty was no less moved as she tenderly embraced him, and it took her a minute or two to conquer her emotion. Then she said,—

"Dear Boy! I am so glad to see you! How you have grown!"

Boy laughed sheepishly and shamefacedly. How he had grown indeed! It seemed quite a mistake to have done it. Why could he not always have stayed a little child and looked at "booful pick-shures" with "Kiss Letty"? And indeed no matter how much we are bound to believe in the wise ordainments of a sublime and perfect Providence, we may ask whether for many a child it would not have been happiest never to have grown up at all. Honestly speaking, we cannot grieve for the fair legions of beloved children who have passed

away in their childhood,—we know, even without the aid of Gospel comfort, that it is "far better" with them so. If Boy had been an analyst of feeling he would have known that deep in his sensitive consciousness there was a faint regret that he had even become so old as nine years. It was the first pulsation of that much crueller sense of loss and error which sometimes affects the full-grown man, when looking back to the bygone days of his youth. But Boy, though he was beginning to take himself into his own confidence, and to consider carefully the results of giving way to emotion, had not proceeded so far as to understand all the fine breathings of variable thought that stirred his brain cells as the wind stirs ripples on a pool; he only knew that just now he was both very glad and very sorry—very glad to be again with "Kiss Letty," very sorry to have "grown" so much as to be somewhat more removed from her than in former time. He hung affectionately on her arm though now, as they went into the house together,—and a sense of "home sweet home" gave his step lightness and his eyes a clear sparkle, as he passed through the pretty hall, adorned in Scottish fashion with great stag antlers and deer heads, and bright clusters of heather and scarlet rowans set on the table as well as in every corner where a touch of colour or brightness seemed necessary,—and then up the broad, softly carpeted stairs to the delightful room which had been prepared for him—a room with a wide window com-

manding a glorious view of almost the whole glittering expanse of Loch Katrine. And here Margaret awaited him—Margaret, as comely and tidy as of old, with her kind face and spotless apron,—Margaret, who met him with almost the same exclamation as Miss Letty though tuned in different words.

"Bless the lad! How he has grown, to be sure!"

And again he blushed and smiled, and looked sheepish, and felt happy and sad at once. But Margaret soon found out to his comfort and her own that he was not so advanced in years and knowledge after all,—that he had but slipshod notions as to the manner of washing his hands, and was apt to perform that cleansing business in a very limp and half-hearted fashion. Likewise he had little or no idea as to how he should brush and comb his curly hair,—and it was greatly to Margaret's delight that she found her services could not be quite dispensed with She began at once to "arrange" him according to her own particular way of "valeting" a small boy, and presently turned him out to her entire satisfaction in a becoming white flannel suit,—one of the half-dozen Major Desmond had bought him on the way through London,—with a soft blue tie knotted under his little open collar, and the bright waves of his hair disposed to the best advantage. Very sweet and very wistful too the little fellow looked as he then went down to dinner; and Miss Letty's eyes grew dim with a sudden moisture, as she glanced at him from time

to time and noticed, as only a loving woman can, the slight indefinable alterations in him, which, like the faintly pencilled lines in a drawing, were bound to become darker, and gradually to take their place in the whole composition of his life and character. Major Desmond had told her exactly the condition in which he had found him, and as she heard, her heart grew heavy and sore. Why, she thought, if his parents were going to do no more than allow him to run wild among the common boys of a village sea-shore, could they not have given him the chance she had offered? She said something to this effect in half a dozen words to her old friend Dick, who, with a puzzled tug at his white moustache and a shrug of his broad shoulders, gave the matter up as a sort of difficult conundrum.

"But it's the mother, Letty,—it's the soft, fat, absurdly self-important mother!" he declared. "Tell you what, Jim D'Arcy-Muir, besotted with drink as he is, knows he is a beast, and that is a great point in his favour. When a man knows he is a beast and admits it, you can give him credit for honesty if for nothing else; and Jim, I firmly believe, would hand you over the little chap at once, and be glad enough to give him such a jolly good start in life. But Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir — there! — she's a beast too and she doesn't know it, which makes all the difference. She's not a beast in drinking—no—but she's a beast in her sloth and love of muddle and dirt and confusion, and

worse than a beast in stupid obstinacy. No one can do anything with her. She will always be a drag on Boy's wheel!"

"His mother?" suggested Miss Leslie gently.

"Yes, I know. She's his mother, more's the pity. The days are coming when he will despise his mother —and that is a very bad look-out for any chap. But it will not be his fault—it will be hers."

Miss Leslie said no more on the subject just then,— she had Boy at any rate for a month to herself, and she resolved to watch him closely and study his character for herself.

She began a close and tender observation of him,— his manners, his little quaint ways of speech,—and for the first week of his stay with her she noticed nothing to awaken her anxiety. The change from his "scavenger" life on the sea-shore to the elegance and refinement of Miss Letty's home, combined with the beauty and freshness of an open-air existence in the Scottish Highlands, gave Boy for the time a happy oblivion of all his recent sordid experiences. Fishing, boating, climbing, and riding on a lovable little Shetland pony which his kind hostess had bought for his use—these new and delightful pastimes, so enjoyable to healthy childhood, were all his to try in turn,—and whether he was rushing like a little madcap to the top of a convenient hill to catch a first sight of Major Desmond as he came down from the higher moors with the rest of the shooting-party,—or

whether he was helping Miss Letty gather great picturesque bunches of bracken and rowan branches in the woods for the decoration of the house, Boy was unthinkingly and unquestioningly happy. Winsome and bright, he behaved like the real child he truly was in years; he had no time to go away by himself into little corners and think, for there was a boy named Alister McDonald, two years older than himself, who struck up a friendship with him, and had no sort of idea of leaving him alone. This same Alister was a terrible person. He too was an only son,—but his father, Colonel McDonald, was not a "Poo Sing," but a very fine specimen of a gentleman at his best. He and his wife, a woman of bright disposition and sweet character, had brought up their boy to love all things bold, manly, and true—and Alister had developed the bold and manly by doing everything in the world that could risk his life and get him into a pickle—and his present way of serving the Cause of Truth was to go and tell everything to his mother. The very first day he made acquaintance with Boy, he stuck his small hands in his small trouser pockets and remarked airily,—

"I suppose you're game for any sort of a lark, ain't you?"

"I suppose I am!" Boy answered, with a touch of reserved assurance.

"All right! Then we'll be pals!" Alister had answered, and to prove his sincerity, took Boy at

once in charge, and escorted him straight away to a mysterious salmon-pool, where, trying to angle with a long willow wand, a bit of string, and a just killed wasp instead of the orthodox fly, they both very nearly fell in and made an end of their lives. To be the hero of hairbreadth escapes suited Alister perfectly. He always had some dark scheme in his mind—some new plan for generally alarming and exciting the neighbourhood. But as a matter of fact all the people in the place had got pretty well used to the endless scrapes of "Maister Alister" as they called him, and even his mother, whose nerves had undergone many a severe trial concerning the delinquencies of her only darling, had now become more or less resigned to the inevitable. Two or three days of each other's society were enough to make Boy and Alister inseparables,—and many a hearty roar of laughter did their strange adventures on hill and moor, by stream and loch, cause Major Desmond and his sporting friends,—while kind Miss Letty, with two or three other pleasant ladies who were her guests, laughed with them, and quickly forgave the little truants all their mischief.

One day there came a pause in the merriment,—the heroic Alister was seized with a raging toothache, a malady which might even upset the calm of an Ajax. There was nothing for it but to have the worrying tooth pulled out, whereupon Alister's mother took him to Edinburgh for the necessary operation.

It was a dull, cloudy sort of day,—rain had set in early in the morning, and a furious gust of wind swept the fair waters of Loch Katrine, and bent the silvery birches to and fro till they presented the weird aspect of shivering white ghosts, stooping to bathe their long tresses in the waters, and anon 'lifting themselves again in attitudes as it seemed of wild despair at the pitiless storm. There was no possibility of either walking or driving or boating, and Alister being away, Boy was rather at a loss what to do with himself. Miss Letty saw him looking a little wistful and wearied, and at once took him in hand herself. Putting her arm around him she said,—

"What shall we do to amuse ourselves, Boy?"

Boy smiled faintly.

"I don't know!" he said.

"Do you like pictures as much as you used to do?"

Boy hesitated.

"Some!" he said dubiously. "Not all!"

"Did you bring your magic lantern with you?"

Boy opened his eyes wide.

"Oh no! That's all gone to pieces long ago!"

Miss Letty made no comment on the magic lantern's destruction.

"Well, let's ask Margaret what there is among your things to amuse ourselves with," she said cheerily. "All sorts of odds and ends were packed with your clothes!"

"Were there?" said Boy. "Mother didn't pack them—it was the servant."

Again Miss Letty made no comment, and Boy holding her by the arm went with her to Margaret, who, on being questioned, smiled, and opened a cupboard full of curious-looking objects.

"They're all more or less broken, my leddy!" she said. "But the Cow is here as good as it ever was!"

"The Cow!" and Miss Letty laughed, but a little moisture suffused her eyes.

Boy looked at her questioningly.

"What's the Cow?" he asked.

"Ah, darling, you have grown to be such a little man now that you don't remember the poor Cow!" said Miss Letty half laughingly, half sadly. "Where is it, Margaret?"

Margaret selected it from the heap in the cupboard, and gave it gingerly into the hand of her mistress—the same wise-looking quadruped, with its movable head wagging as faithfully as ever.

Boy looked at it with a smile that was almost derisive.

"That a Cow!" he said.

"Yes," said Miss Letty, "and you thought it a very nice Cow when you were a little child. But you have grown so big now—though you are only nine years old. Oh, don't you remember!—you used to call it 'Dunny'?"

Boy's face brightened with a sudden look of recognition.

"Oh, yes! I remember now!" he said, and he gave a fillip with his finger to the head of the despised "Dunny" to set it wagging faster. "That was when I was quite a baby!"

"Yes," said Miss Leslie, sorrowfully, "when you were quite a baby!"

She held the Cow in her hand tenderly—she would not put it back among the broken toys. But she said no more about it just then. The only thing they found among the mass of rubbish which had been thrust into Boy's portmanteau so hastily by his mother's maid-of-all-work was a German War-game, which Boy proposed to play with Miss Letty.

She acceded, and together they went down to her own boudoir, where she placed "Dunny" on a little bracket above her writing-desk, and then applied herself to master the game of killing as per German military tactics. Boy proved himself an extraordinary adept at this mechanical warfare, and won all along as triumphantly as if he had been the Kaiser himself. Indeed, he showed an extraordinary amount of cunning, which, though clever, was not altogether as lovable and childlike as Miss Letty in her simplicity of soul could have wished. There was a vague discomfort in her mind as she allowed herself to be ignominiously beaten. For though the game was only a game, it had its

fixed rules like every other, and Miss Letty was sorely worried by the fancy—it was only a fancy—that Boy had been trying to "cheat" in a peculiarly adroit fashion. She would not allow herself to dwell upon the point, however, and when she put away the game, and took him to tea in the drawing-room, where two of the ladies staying in the house were sitting with their needlework, and listening to the howling wind and gusty rain, she gave him a little chair by the side of the bright fire, which was necessary on such a chilly day in Scotland, and let him talk as he liked, and generally express his sentiments. For some time he was very silent, contenting himself with tea-cake and scones, and only occasionally remarking on the absence of Alister McDonald, and the suffering he was perhaps undergoing with his tooth; but after a bit he began to ask questions, and unburden his mind on sundry matters, encouraged thereto by one of the ladies present, who was interested by his winsome face, clear eyes, and light, trim little figure.

"What are you going to be when you are a man?" she asked.

Boy considered.

"A man is a long way off," he answered gravely. "And, you see, you can never tell what may happen! Dads is a man. But he isn't anything."

"He's an officer in the Army, dear," corrected Miss Letty gently: "a retired officer,—but still an officer."

"What is the good of being an officer if you retire before you ever fight?" asked Boy.

All the ladies smiled, but volunteered no answer

"You see it wouldn't be any use," went on Boy reflectively. "I shouldn't care to have to learn how to fight if I wasn't ever wanted to do it. I think I'd rather be like Rattling Jack!"

"Who on earth is 'Rattling Jack'?" asked the youngest lady present, suppressing a laugh.

"He is an old man at home," explained Boy. "He used to be on a merchant vessel, trading to India, Japan, and China, and all that, and he says he has seen nearly the whole world. People say he's got a lot of money hidden away in his mattress—and that when he was in Ceylon he managed to steal a ruby worth ten thousand pounds! Fancy! Wasn't that clever of him? And he's got it still!"

"Then he's a thief!" said Miss Letty, trying to look severe. "It isn't at all clever to steal. It's very wicked! He must be a bad man!"

"Yes, I suppose he is," said Boy with a little sigh. "But of course the person from whom he stole the ruby ought to have come after him. But he never did. So that was lucky! And some people say it's only a bit of red glass he's got!"

"Whatever it is, a bit of glass or a ruby, he had no business to steal it!" said Miss Letty.

"Oh, but he hasn't been found out," answered Boy. "And he doesn't mind telling people he's got it!"

There was a pause. Miss Letty was a trifle vexed, —the other two ladies were merely amused.

"I'll tell you another thing about him," said Boy, suddenly warming into confidence. "He buys things off us!"

They all laughed outright.

"Buys things off us!" exclaimed Miss Letty. "Oh, Boy dear, what do you mean?"

"Well, you see, all along the shore there are the most curious things washed in from the sea," said Boy—"silver spoons and forks, and penknives, and boxes, and sometimes money. Just before I came away I found a gold bracelet in the sand, and Rattling Jack gave me one-and-sixpence for it, and he had it cleaned, and it was solid gold, and he sold it for three pounds. Wasn't that clever of him?"

Again the laughter broke out, but Miss Letty sighed.

"I don't think 'Rattling Jack' is quite a nice person for you to talk to," she said. "Does your mother know anything about him?"

"Oh, no! Mother doesn't know anybody!" answered Boy candidly. "I make my own friends!"

"Well, we don't want you to be a Rattling Jack!" said the young lady who had before spoken. "We want you to be a brave, honest man, and a gentleman! You must try for the Navy—not the Merchant Navy, but the regular fighting Navy—the Queen's Navy!"

"Yes—but you never get higher than 'Admiral' there!" said Boy, with a matter-of-fact cynicism. "Rattling Jack told me that was just an honour without sufficient pay to keep it up. It isn't worth working for, I fancy!"

"My dear Boy!" exclaimed Miss Letty, distressed. "Not worth working for! How did *you* get such ideas in your head? What *is* worth working for?"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Boy. "Not much, I expect. All you can do is to amuse yourself, and you want lots of money for that!"

The pained expression deepened on Miss Letty's sweet old face, but she could say nothing just then, as a diversion was created by the sudden bouncing entrance of Alister McDonald, accompanied by his mother, both damp with rain, but both with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, back from Edinburgh, and fresh from their drive through the storm from the Callander station.

"Please excuse us!" laughed Mrs. McDonald. "But we thought you might be having tea about this time, so we risked coming in!"

Miss Leslie welcomed them heartily, with the unaffected sincerity which was her great charm, and ordered fresh tea and scones; while Alister, drawing Boy aside, related to him with graphic picturesqueness of detail his thrilling experiences at the dentist's.

"He said, would I have gas? I said, what is gas?

And mother said it was a stuff you took through a tube, and you went off stiff and silly, and didn't know what was going on! And I said no, I wouldn't have gas. I liked to know what was being done to me anyhow! 'It will hurt you, sir,' said he. I said 'All right; it hurts now.' 'Sit in this chair,' he said, 'and keep still.' I sat in a big chair with a sort of iron swivel on to it, and I laid my head back, and opened my mouth wide. And he looked in. And I thought of the execution of Charles the First! Then he said, 'Now, sir, steady!' Then I shut my eyes and repeated in my head,

> The boy stood on the burning deck,
> When all but him had fled!

and before I got to 'fled' out came the tooth with a big prong at the end. And I never cried. And he said to me, 'Did it hurt you?' 'Not a bit,' said I. But of course it did. Only he wasn't going to crow over me—not if I knew it! And he didn't. He looked pretty small, I can tell you, with that tooth in his nippers. My! What scones! Such a jolly lot of butter!" And his conversation terminated abruptly in a huge bite of the succulent material offered to him by one of the ladies already on duty to attend his budding masculinity.

Boy watched him enjoying his tea with wonder and a touch of envy. He too would have bidden defiance to the terrors of the dentist as carelessly

as Alister, but it would have been out of sheer indifference, not combativeness. Here was the contrast between the temperaments of the two boys, and a very serious contrast it was. The slight affair of Alister's tooth was a test of character. Boy would have gone through the painful ordeal with quiet stoicism because he would not have considered it worth while to do otherwise,—Alister went through it with the idea that somehow or other he was more than a match for the dentist. Herein was the varying quality of environment which would make of the one boy a warm-blooded, courageous man, and of the other perhaps a languid cynic. Young as the children were, any close student of human nature could trace the diverging possibilities of each mind already, and the uncomfortable little pang at Miss Letty's heart was not hurting her without some cause. However, she was not of a morose or morbid disposition, and she would not allow herself to give way to these first premonitions of doubt as to Boy's development. She resolved to make one more effort to rescue him from his uncouth home surroundings, and meanwhile she contented herself with letting him enjoy his holiday as much as possible, and giving him all the liberty he seemed to need.

One day, however, there occurred a grand catastrophe. Major Desmond had left his gun in the hall, with express orders that it was not to be touched. But just about an hour before dinner

there was the sound of a tremendous explosion, and a crash of glass,—and on a contingent of the household running to see what was the matter, lo! there was the Major's gun in the same place and position, but a charge was missing, and one of the windows in the hall was shivered to atoms. The Major had a temper, and he lost it for the immediate moment.

"Now, who has done this?" he shouted. "Didn't I give express orders that my gun was to be left alone! By Jove, whoever has been meddling with it ought to have a sound thrashing! Might have killed somebody, besides breaking windows! Come now! Who did it?"

There was nobody to answer. The servants were all at a loss,—Boy and Alister were out in the grounds, so it was said,—no one had touched the gun,—it must have gone off by itself.

"D——d nonsense!" roared the Major, forgetting the presence of Miss Leslie, who stood looking at the broken window in perplexity,—"I put the gun up in a safe corner out of harm's way. If it had gone off by itself the charge would have lodged in the ceiling, not through the window. I am not such an ass as not to see that! Some one has been playing pranks with it! Where's Boy?"

"Oh, Boy wouldn't touch it," protested Miss Letty, "I'm sure he wouldn't!"

"Well, where is he?" persisted the Major: "he may know something about it!" and marching out-

side the door he called, "Boy!" in a voice strong enough to awaken all the fabled sleeping giants of the hills.

Boy answered the call with quite an amazing promptitude.

"Yes, Major!"

The Major stared.

"Where did you come from so suddenly?" he demanded. "You young rascal! You have been meddling with my gun!"

"I'm sure I haven't!" replied Boy coolly.

"Then who has?"

"How can I tell?" said Boy, with airy indifference.

"Boy!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Look at me straight!"

Boy obeyed. The clear eyes met the Major's stare without flinching.

"You swear on your honour—now, sir, remember! I am a soldier, and 'on your honour' is a very serious thing to say—swear on your honour that you never touched that gun!"

Boy hesitated—just a second's pause. And suddenly a high piping voice called out,—

"Own up, Boy! Own up! Don't be caddish!"

Boy flushed crimson to the roots of his fair curls, and cast down his eyes. He had no occasion to speak. The Major's face grew grave and stern.

"You may go, sir!"

"Oh, Boy!"

The cry came from Miss Letty, and Boy tried to shuffle past without looking at her, but she caught him by the arm.

"Boy," she said, her sweet voice shaking with suppressed excitement, "how could you tell a lie?"

He stopped—uneasily shifting one foot against the other, and keeping his eyes cast down. She stretched out her soft, kind little hand.

"Come with me," she continued. "Come and talk to me alone, and tell me why you were so wicked, and then we will go and ask the Major's pardon."

She looked at him steadily. And her sweet face, and tender eyes full of tears, were more than the child's unnatural stoicism could bear. His little chest heaved—his lips quivered.

"I——I——" and he got no further, but broke down in a wild fit of sobbing. Miss Letty put her arm round him, and gently led him away. The Major, who had stood grim and rigid in the hall, watched her go, and coughed fiercely, unaware that the ubiquitous Alister McDonald was standing on the threshold of the hall where the little scene had taken place, and was watching him inquisitively, with his little hands in his little trouser pockets as usual.

"Hullo, Major!" said this imp: "Don't *you* cry!"

"Eh—what? Cry! Me! God bless my soul! Go to——the North Pole with you!" snapped out

the Major irascibly. "What business have you here, sir, staring at me?"

"Oh, come now, I say," returned the unabashed Alister. "Don't be raspy! I suppose I can look at you as well as anybody else, can't I? I like looking at you!"

The Major gave a short laugh.

"Oh, you do, do you!" he returned. "Much obliged to you, I'm sure!"

He coughed again, laughed, chuckled—and then settled his features into gravity.

"Now, look here, you scamp," he said, resting his big hand on Alister's small shoulder: "How did it happen?"

"Well, we were playing soldiers," explained Alister, "and I was the Britisher, and he was the Britisher's enemy. He was half starved, and he had to get behind an entrenchment. The entrenchment was the hall, and he was in a terrible way, because you see he had no water, no food, and he was run down with fever and ague. You see, I was the well-fed Britisher, and I had everybody looking after me, and all the world watching what I was going to do,—and I had prayers put up for me in all the churches, and he was only a savage and a brother. But he said, 'I have got a way to surprise you,' said he, and he turned a somersault, and he said, 'Yah!' as savages do, you know,—and he ran behind his entrenchment (the hall door), and just without thinking took up the gun and fired

it through the window. I was lying low, waiting attack, and I was nearly killed—not quite—and then he was frightened, and ran out, and he said, 'We'll be brothers,' and we hid in ambush, and then you called——"

"Yes, that's all very well!" said the Major, suppressing his strong desire to grin at this account of warfare; "But why did he tell a lie?"

"Oh, I suppose because he was the enemy!" replied Alister calmly. "You see, in the camp he had nobody watching him, and no churches to pray for him,—he was only a savage! I expect that's what it was!"

The Major looked reflective.

"Well, now you had better go away home," he said. "There'll be no more fighting or games between Christian brotherhoods to-day. Boy will have to be punished."

Alister's small face became exceedingly serious.

"I say, don't be hard on him!" he said, expostulatingly. "He's such a little chap!"

The Major preserved his solemnity.

"He's only two years younger than you are—quite old enough to know how to tell the truth!"

"Has he got a mother?" asked Alister.

"Yes."

"Well, you see, she isn't here, and he can't go and ask her about it, so perhaps he got a bit muddled like. I hope you will let him down easy!"

The Major bit his lips under his fuzzy white

moustache, to hide the smile that threatened to break into a roar of laughter, as the young gentleman, after giving expression to these sentiments, sauntered off somewhat dejectedly; and then, turning into the house, put away the gun that had been the cause of all the mischief, and went round to the stables to devise some means of stuffing up the broken window in the hall for the night. And his thoughts were touched with sorrow as well as pity.

"Unfortunate little chap!" he muttered. "Once let him take to lying, and he is done for. All the Lettys in the world could not save him. I wonder now how the devil he came to begin it? It is not his first lie—he did it too well, and looked too cool for it. I should like to know how he began!"

And this was just what Miss Letty was finding out, bit by bit, as she sat in her own quiet room with Boy on her knee clasped in her arms, and talking to him gently. She heard all about his life on the sea-shore, and the little scavengers he met there who had taught him how clever it was to "do" people, and to cheat, and generally mislead and deceive the simple and unsuspecting,—and as she listened to the strange moral axioms he had picked up, and gradually gathered from him as he talked some idea of the lonely life he led, uncared for and untaught, save in the most superficial and slipshod fashion, her heart warmed to him more and more with an almost painful tenderness, and when with a short sigh he paused in

his disjointed narrative, the tears were heavy in her eyes. She set him gently down from her knee and kissed him.

"We'll say no more about it, Boy," she whispered. "Run to the Major and tell him you are very sorry, and that you will never tell a lie again."

Boy hesitated a moment. Then, impulsively throwing his arms round her neck and kissing her, he ran quickly away. He found the Major in the billiard-room reading his newspaper and smoking, and went straight up to him,

"I'm very sorry, sir," he faltered.

Major Desmond laid down his paper and looked at him full in the face, with the straight steel-blue eyes that had in them as much command as tenderness.

"Sorry for what?" he demanded,—"For touching the gun, or for telling a lie?"

Boy's heart swelled, and his eyes were misty and aching.

"For both, sir," he said.

The Major held out his hand, and Boy laid his own little trembling hot fingers in that cool clean palm.

"That's right!" said Desmond: "Disobedience is bad, but a lie is worse,—don't do either! Is that agreed?"

"Yes, sir!"

Boy answered bravely enough, but his spirit sank as he thought that if he never disobeyed, his

obedience, instead of a virtue, would oblige him to do the most foolish and unnecessary things under his mother's orders,—and if he never told a lie, his hours of freedom and play would be considerably if not altogether curtailed, and he would be made the poor little peg on which his parents would hang their many quarrels and discussions. The Major noticed the touch of hesitation in his answer as well as in his manner, and did not like it. But he repressed his own forebodings, and smiled cheerily down upon the small forlorn lad in whom lay the budding promise of a man who might, or might not, be fit for good fighting in the combat of life.

"When you are bigger and stronger I'll show you how to handle a gun," he said,—"At present you are too small a chap. You would blow yourself into bits as easily as you blew out the hall window. Now come along with me and I'll show you the birds we got to-day."

He strode out into the grounds, and Boy followed him with an odd mixture of feeling. Sorrow and shame, united to wonder and scorn, put him into a mental condition not easy to explain. To his childish mind it seemed difficult to understand why Major Desmond and Miss Letty should be such straight, honest, sober folk, and his own father and mother such shiftless, indifferent, careless people.

"They don't seem to see that a boy can't do just as well with a father who doesn't care about him, as

he could with a father who does!" he mused. "I suppose I'm bound to be a lonely boy!"

And he trotted on in silence beside the Major, and looked at the beautiful shot grouse and blackcock, and was very attentive and docile and respectful, and the Major felt a twinge of pain in his good heart as he realized that Boy had plenty of material in him for the making of worthy manhood, material which was being thrown away for want of proper management and training. He confided his feelings on this subject to Miss Leslie that night, in the company of a brother officer, some years younger than himself, who had few joys left in life save the love of sport and a good game of chess or billiards. Captain Fitzgerald Crosby—or "Fitz" as he was generally called—was a fine, upright personage, with a most alarmingly grim and rigid cast of countenance which rather repelled timid people on first introduction. He was "a cross-looking old boor" with all the ladies until he smiled. Then such a radiance played in his quiet grey eyes, and such a kindness softened the lines of his mouth and smoothed away the furrows of his brows, that he was voted a "darling" instantly. On this occasion, when Major Desmond started off expatiating on the waste of Boy's life, and Miss Letty paused in her knitting, listening to his remarks with sorrowful attention, Fitz looked particularly glum handling his billiard cue thoughtfully, and staring at its point as though it were a magic wand to conjure with.

"There's a good deal of waste everywhere, it seems to me," he said slowly. "The scientific fellows tell us that nothing is wasted in the way of matter,—every grain of dust and every drop of dew has got its own special business, and is of special use; but upon my word, when you come to think of the finer things—love and hope and goodness and charity and all the rest of it, it seems nothing but waste all along. There's a great waste of love especially!"

The Major coughed, and hit a ball viciously.

"Yes, there's a great waste of love," went on the unheeding and still gloomily frowning Fitz. "We set our hearts on a thing, and it's immediately taken from us,—we work all our days for a promising son or a favourite daughter, and they frequently turn out more ungrateful than the very dogs we feed—and as Byron says, 'Alas, our young affections run to waste and water but the desert!' Byron was the only poet who ever lived, in my opinion!"

Major Desmond gave a short laugh.

"Upon my word, Fitz, you're a regular old croaker this evening, aren't you? You're making our hostess quite miserable!"

"Oh no," said Miss Letty, brightly, for with her usual sweetness she never thought of her own "wasted young affections" at all, but only of the disappointments of her friends, and she knew that Fitz had suffered. "I feel with Captain Crosby, that some things are very hard for us to understand. But I

think myself that just as no drop of dew or grain of dust is wasted, so no kind action or true love is wasted either. It may seem so,—but it is not. And let us hope poor Boy will be all right. But he certainly ought to be sent to school. I think"—here she paused and looked up smiling—"I think I shall have another try."

The Major paused in his game, while his friend Fitz glowered sullenly at the balls.

"You will, Letty? You mean you will try to give the little chap another chance of proper education?"

"Yes, I think so," said Miss Letty, bending over her knitting, while her needles clicked cheerily in her small, pretty hands. "I will write very earnestly to both Captain and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, and make a perfectly plain, practical, business proposal to them. If they refuse it, well, I shall have relieved my feelings by asking."

A sudden radiance seemed to illuminate the billiard-table, but it was only Fitz smiling across it.

"Just like you, Miss Letty," he said. "Whenever there is something good to be done you are the one to do it!"

Miss Letty shook her head deprecatingly and went on with her knitting for a while,—then presently she retired to bed after sending in whiskies and sodas to the two gentlemen to refresh themselves while finishing their game. Fitz had turned crusty again,

apparently. Jerking his head backward towards the door through which Miss Letty had disappeared after saying her gentle good-night, he demanded,

"Why didn't you marry her?"

"Because she wouldn't have me," replied the Major promptly.

"Why wouldn't she have you?"

"Because she is keeping faith with a dead rascal. Expects to meet him somewhere in heaven by-and-by! Lord, if ever a liar and scamp deserves to wear a crown of gold and sing 'Hallelujah,' then Harry Raikes is a real live angel and no mistake!"

"Upon my word!" said Fitz slowly, "I think it's liars and scoundrels generally who consider that they're the very people fitted for gold crowns in heaven. Now *I* don't expect a gold crown. I don't consider myself worth an angel's feather, let alone a pair of angel's wings. But I have a pious uncle—old as Methuselah—who goes to church three times a day and slangs all his neighbours who don't—and will you believe me, he has an idea that God is thoroughly well pleased with him for that. What a blasphemous old beggar it is!"

He laughed, and in his enjoyment allowed the Major to win the game at billiards. Then putting up his cue he mixed a mild glass of whisky and water and drank it off.

"I'll go to bed now, Dick," he said; "I don't stay up as late as I used to!"

"We're getting on, Fitz, that's why," replied Desmond. "We're getting on, that's what it is."

"Yes, that's what it is," returned Fitz cheerily. "But I really don't mind. Getting on means getting out—getting out of this world into a better. Good night, cld chap!"

"Good night!"

And the two worthy fellows went to their respective rooms and slept the sleep of the just. But there were two other people in the house who could not sleep at all that night—these were Miss Letty and Boy. Miss Letty was grieving for Boy, and Boy was grieving for himself. What was she to do about Boy? Miss Leslie thought. What was he to do about himself? Boy thought. Miss Letty felt that if she could only get Boy away from his home surroundings, and place him at a good English preparatory school, she would perhaps be the saving of him. Boy felt that if he could only run away somewhere on one of those ambitious expeditions which Alister McDonald was always telling him about, he might, to put it grandly, make a career. But the world was broad and wide, and he was very small and young. Difficulties bristled in his path, and he had not the heart nor the strength to face them even in thought. The spark of an aspiring intelligence was within him, but the influences were all against its kindling up into a useful or brilliant flame.

The next day saw him again at play with Alister, and the two boys went out on Loch Katrine together in a boat to fish for trout. They were not very skilled fishermen, and there was a good deal more splashing about with the line, and patting the water with the oars than anything else. They stayed wobbling about on the friendly lake till sunset,—and then as they saw the majestic king of the sky descend into the west, glorious in panoply of gold and crimson, with fleecy white clouds rolling themselves into a great canopy for his head, and a wide stretch of crimson spreading beneath him like a carpet for his march downward, both the children were suddenly overcome by a sense of awe, and watched the brilliant colours of the heavens, and the purple shadows of the mountains reflected on the water, in silence for many minutes.

"I say, Boy, what are you going to be?" asked Alister, after a long pause.

Boy answered with truth, "I don't know."

"I'm going to be a soldier," said Alister. "It's a fine thing to be a soldier. Though father says a soldier can't get a drink if he wants to, unless he takes off his uniform first. Isn't that battish? But whenever we have another war we're going to keep our uniforms on and drink in them whenever we want to."

"And will you go and fight?" asked Boy wistfully.

"Rather! Let me hear any one abusing England, and I'll run them straight through with my sword in no time!"

"Will you—really?" And Boy looked respectfully at Alister's round face, already seeing the martial hero in the saucy physiognomy of his friend,—the sparkling eyes, the defiant little nose, and the chubby dimpled chin.

"When you're a soldier, you're a defender of the country," went on Alister, "and the Queen says, 'Thank you very much, I hope you'll do your duty!' And you get medals and things, and the Victoria Cross. That's what's called a V.C. I know a man who's got that, and he's just as proud as Punch. He's one of father's friends. But he's awfully poor—awfully. And he's got rheumatism through having slept out several nights on a field of battle—and he's all cramped and funny, with twisted legs and crooked fingers, but he's just as proud as Punch of his V.C."

Boy tried to grasp the picture of a gentleman who was "all cramped and funny, with twisted legs and crooked fingers," who was "just as proud as Punch." But he could not do it. And Alister putting up his oars said, "Let's have some music!" and forthwith drew out a concertina from the bottom of the boat and discoursed thereon a wailful ear-piercing melody. Boy had heard him play this distressing instrument before, but never quite so dolefully. The melancholy snoring sounds emanating from between Alister's fat fingers seemed to cast a gloom over the landscape—to make the mountains around them look darker and more eerie—to give a melodramatic effect to the

sinking sun, and to suggest the possibility of bogies and kelpies trooping down on the Silver Strand to perform a fantastic dance thereon. Alister thought his own playing quite beautiful; Boy considered it lovely too, but dreadful. When he could bear it no more he ventured to disturb the performance.

"I say, Alister!"

Alister's eyes had closed in a dumb ecstacy over a particularly prolonged and dismal chord, but he opened them quickly and stopped playing.

"What?"

"How do you start being a soldier?"

"You go to school first—preparatory," said Alister, putting away the concertina, much to Boy's relief. "I'm there now. Then you go to a regular public military training school, and you learn heaps and heaps of things,—then you are measured and weighed, and your chest is thumped and your teeth looked to, then if that's all right, you perhaps go to Sandhurst, and then you pass all sorts of stiff exams. In fact," said Alister, warming with his subject, "you learn *everything!* There's *nothing* that you're not expected to know. Think of that! And you must keep your teeth all right, and your chest sound, and you must grow to a certain height. Oh, there's lots to do all round, I can tell you!"

"I see!"

Boy's heart sank, but he determined to ask to be sent to school directly he went home again. He

would not, if he could help it, remain under the tuition of Rattling Jack.

"Aren't you going to school?" queried Alister.

"I hope so."

"Come to mine," said Alister. "It's awfully jolly, —we play cricket and football and hockey, and we have supper-fights and no end of larks. Ask your father to send you to mine. I'll give you the address when we get home."

"Thanks," said Boy, with an attempt to look as if the going to Alister's school would be the easiest thing in the world,—"I will see if I can come."

Poor little lad! He had no more hope of being sent to Alister's school than of being carried off in a fairy boat to the moon. But he thought a great deal about school that night when he had parted from his chum.

"I'll tell mother I want to go to school," he said to himself. "That can do no harm. If she won't send me I'll have to run away."

Meanwhile Miss Leslie wrote long and very earnest letters to both Captain and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir. Once more she offered to make Boy her heir, on condition that she should be allowed to take care of him, and control his education. Her letters arrived at their destination when the "Honourable Jim" was snoring the hours away in a heavy drunken sleep, and naturally Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir read the one intended for her husband as well as the one addressed to

herself. She smiled a fat smile as she consigned the one written to Jim ("Like her impudence!" she murmured to herself) to the convenient flames, and resolved to say nothing about it ("For the education of my son," she said, "is my affair!"). She laid her large hand on her large breast with an approving and consolatory pat. To be a "mother" was a great thing.

"Silly old woman!" ejaculated Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, her stout bust heaving with matronly offence. "She has lost all her own matrimonial chances—she would insist on sticking to the memory of Harry Raikes—and there she is, of course, all alone in the world, and wants my boy to be a son to her. Poor dear child! A nice time he would have of it, a slave to an old maid's fads and fancies!"

So she sat down and wrote the following letter. She had a shocking handwriting,—it sloped downwards and sideways all over a sheet of paper, in very much the way her mind sloped and went sideways likewise:—

"MY DEAR LETITIA,

I am sorry to see from the tone of your letter that you are still feeling so lonely. Of course it is very hard for you to be all alone at your age, and I am very sorry for you. But to part with my son to you as you suggest is quite out of the question. A mother's claims are paramount! I am sure you

would be very nice to him, and the dear boy deserves everything that can possibly be done for his advantage, but his mother must preside over his education. I am sure that, though unmarried yourself, you will see the force of this. If, however, you still decide to make him your heir, I am sure he will be very worthy of it, and always remember you affectionately after you are gone. We shall expect our son home next week, and hope that Major Desmond will be able to escort him.

Yours very sincerely,

AMELIA D'ARCY-MUIR."

This letter was the charter of Boy's doom. Not all the stars in their courses would be able to alter his fate from henceforth. Miss Leslie cried quietly to herself in her room for nearly an hour,—then bathed her eyes, smoothed her hair, and attended to her household duties as placidly and sweetly as ever. She never spoke to Boy at all on the subject. To Major Desmond and his friend Fitz she said simply,—

"I wrote to Boy's mother and father. But it is no use!"

"I thought not!" said the Major gruffly.

"Poor little chap!" said Fitz.

And by tacit consent they dropped the subject.

But one day before Boy went back to his loving parents, Miss Leslie took him out by himself for a walk with her through the beautiful Pass of Achray,

and there sitting down by the dry and fragrant heather brilliant with bloom, she talked to him gently, holding his little grimy hand in her own.

"Boy," she said, "if you ever want anything, will you write to me? You *can* write now, can't you?"

Boy nodded, looking a trifle pale and startled.

"Suppose," went on Miss Leslie, feeling something like a wicked conspirator as she suggested it,—"Suppose you wanted to go to school and your father wouldn't let you, do you think—do you think—you could run away to me?"

And the gentle lady's soft cheeks crimsoned at the audacity of this proposal.

But Boy's eyes glittered. This was like one of Alister's adventures.

"Yes," he replied breathlessly, "I'm sure I could!"

"Well, well—we will hope that won't be necessary," said Miss Leslie hastily. "You mustn't of course *ever* do such a thing unless you are quite driven to it. But if you *are* in trouble of any sort write to me, and I will—I will meet you anywhere." This with a hazy notion that if it were the North Pole she would somehow manage to be there.

Boy threw his arms round her neck and kissed her.

"Oh, you are good—good!" he said: "I wish I were *your* Boy!"

Miss Letty patted him with a trembling hand—but was silent.

The bees buzzed drowsily in the heather bells,—

the blue sky was flecked with beautiful white clouds, and the lights and shadows changed the aspect of the mountains every few minutes. A little "burnie" chattered at their feet, gurgling over the stones and pebbles, and chuckling among the ferns and grasses, and over its silver ribbon-like streak two gorgeous dragon-flies chased each other, the sunlight flashing gold upon their iridescent wings.

"I wish I could stay with you altogether," said Boy, taking off his cap and ruffling his pretty fair hair with his hands in a sort of nervous agitation—"I feel so happy with you! See how lovely it all is to-day!—God seems really good out here!"

"God *is* really good always, darling," said Miss Letty.

"Yes, I suppose He is—but where we are He doesn't seem good a bit. The people are dirty and miserable and poor,—and even the sea looks cruel!"

"Poor Boy!" murmured Miss Letty to herself, quickly understanding the sense of loneliness and bitterness which sometimes overpowered the child's mind. Aloud she said, as cheerily as she could,—

"That's only fancy, Boy! Everything is good and beautiful in the world as God made it and intended it to be; it's only the bad dispositions and wickednesses of men that make things seem difficult. But if you are good and straightforward everything will come right, and you will perhaps understand why you are sometimes a little bit sad and lonely

now. I daresay it's all for the best . . ." She paused, because in her own clear soul she could *not* think it was quite for the best that the little fellow should have a drunken father and a sloven mother. "Promise me one thing, Boy," she went on,—"Never tell a lie. Liars come to no good,—and when you go to school—for I expect you will go to school—you will find that all nice English boys are brought up to be frank and true, and to stand upon their honour. If a boy tells a lie to shield himself, he is looked upon as a coward by all his schoolfellows. Remember that! No matter what scrapes you get into, tell the truth right out, without the least fear, and you may be sure you are doing well. Even if you get punished, a day's punishment is much better than a lie on your conscience."

Boy listened reverently.

"I'll remember," he said.

"That's right!" And Miss Letty took him again in her arms and kissed him—"God bless you, dear! Try and grow up a good man! You will have a great many troubles and difficulties, I daresay—we all have; but go on trying—try always to be a good brave man!"

Boy returned her embrace with fervour, and promised. After this they went home, and the end of the week saw Boy back again in the remote fishing village with his mother only. His father had gone away on a yachting trip with a friend as fond of

the bottle as himself, and some unkind people said what a good thing it would be if the yacht should go down quietly in the waves and make a speedy end of the two convivialists. Boy was personally rather glad of his father's absence, as he thought it gave him a better chance to discuss things with his mother. For the first one or two days after his return he was very reticent,—he did not say much about his holiday in Scotland—but only mentioned his little friend Alister McDonald.

"Who *is* he?" demanded Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir.

"Oh, he's just Alister McDonald," answered Boy.

"Don't be stupid, Boy. I mean who is his father?"

"Does that matter?"

"Matter! Of course it matters. Family is everything. You must belong to a good family for you to be anybody."

"Must you? Then how about Robert Burns?"

"Robert Burns?" Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir's mouth opened in astonishment.

"Yes," went on Boy dauntlessly,—"I heard all about him in Scotland. They're always talking about him. Robert Burns was a ploughman—and he wrote such beautiful things that everybody, even now, though he is dead ever so long ago, wants to try and make out that they're connected with him in some way or other. Is that what you mean by a good family?"

"No, I don't—certainly not!"—snapped out his mother. "Robert Burns was a very disreputable person. People who write poetry usually are. I didn't ask you who Robert Burns was. I asked you who your friend Alister's father was."

"Colonel McDonald," answered Boy,—"of the Gordon Highlanders."

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir "looked up" his regiment at once, and found that Colonel McDonald was a very distinguished person indeed—quite good blood, in fact—really quite. Whereupon she graciously approved of Alister as Boy's friend; and Boy, emboldened by this, said,—

"Couldn't I go to school where Alister is, mother? I do want to go to school!"

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir asked the name of the school, and when she heard it, pursed her lips together dubiously. It was a famous school, and an expensive one. It boasted of some of the finest teachers in England, whose services were not to be had for nothing.

"I'll see about it," she said grandiloquently,—"I'm not sure I should approve of that school. But of course you must go to school somewhere—and I'll arrange it for you as soon as I can."

Having put the idea into her head, Boy waited with tolerable equanimity. He would write, he thought, to Miss Letty when everything was settled. In the meantime his mother, in her own peculiar

pig-headed way, set to work reading all the advertisements of cheap schools in all the papers, and hit upon one at last that particularly seemed to appeal to her,—one which provided knowledge with physical and moral training for life generally, at the humble cost of about twenty pounds—board and lodging were included—a year. That would do, she resolved. An exchange of letters between herself and the proprietor of this "first-class educational establishment" soon settled the matter—"for," said Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, "there is no occasion to consult Jim. He is too sodden with whisky to know what he is about—he will have to pay the money,—and I shall have to get it out of him, and—and that's all."

And one morning she informed Boy of his approaching destination.

"I have managed a school for you, Boy," she said. "I'm getting your clothes ready, and next week you are going to France."

"France!" cried Boy, and his little heart sank almost into his little boots.

"Yes, France!" said his mother. "There's a charming school at a place called Noirville in Brittany, and I have arranged for you to go there. You'll learn to speak French, which is always a great advantage to a boy. Why, what are you crying about?"

Poor Boy! He tried hard to keep back his tears,

but it was no use—and the more he fought against them, the faster they fell.

"Oh, mother, mother!" he said, at last giving way to his sobs, "I did want to be a real English boy!—a real, *real* English boy!"

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir's little eyes almost shot out of her head in the extremity of her staring astonishment.

"What a ridiculous child you are!" she burst out at last. "How can you be anything else than a real English boy? Isn't your father English? Am not I—your mother—English? And were you not born in England? Good gracious me! I never heard such nonsense in my life! Silly cry-baby! Do you think going to school in France will alter your birth and your nature?"

Boy choked back his sobs, and controlled his tears,—but not trusting himself to speak, he went straight out of his mother's presence, and ran as hard as his little legs could carry him down to the sea-shore. There he sat, a forlorn little figure, on the sand close to the fringe of the sea, and tried to think. It was a difficult task, for he was too young to analyse his own emotions. His hazy idea that he could not possibly be 'a real English boy' if he went to school in France was purely instinctive—he knew nothing about foreign countries or foreign customs of education. But he was hopelessly, bitterly disappointed,—deplorably, cruelly cast down. He knew it would be

no use appealing to his mother. And he did not know where his father was. Even if he had known, he could have done nothing with that estimable parent. It seemed very useless to try and do one's best, he thought. Since he had come back from Scotland he had been so thoroughly determined to follow Miss Letty's precepts—to attempt by small degrees the work of becoming 'a good brave man,' that he had avoided all the dirty little scavenger-boys of the place he had used to foregather with, and he had not even been to see Rattling Jack. He had remained nearly all day with his mother, doing the lessons she gave him to do, and obeying her in every trifling particular, and had been most gently docile and affectionate in his conduct. The silly woman, however, had taken all his loving attention as a proof that he had found Miss Leslie so 'faddy,' and her house in Scotland so dull, that he was glad and grateful to be at home again with 'his own dear mother,' as she herself put it. And now——she was going to send him away to France! His wistful eyes scanned the ocean and the far blue line of the distant horizon,—there was a storm coming up from the north, and the first gusts of wind ruffled the waves and gave them white crests, over which three or four seagulls flew with doleful screams, and Boy's heart grew heavier and heavier. Presently he got up from the sand, dusting his little clothes free from the sparkling grains.

"It's no use," he said hopelessly,—"it isn't a bit of use! I shall never be anything—neither a soldier nor a sailor nor anybody. But I'll write to Miss Letty."

He had begun to retrace his steps homeward, when he saw a figure coming along the stretches of sand,—a figure that stooped and shuffled, and carried a basket on its back. Boy recognized it as the visible form and composition of Rattling Jack, and went straight up to it.

"Hullo, Jack!" said he with a little smile.

The old gentleman turned his bent head round on one side.

"Who be ye?" he demanded. "My back is that stiff with rheumatiz, and my neck is that wincy that I can't lift myself up anyhow!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" said Boy, in his sweet little childish voice. "Couldn't I carry your basket for you?"

Stiff in the back and "wincy" in the neck as he declared himself to be, Rattling Jack did manage to raise his stooping figure a little at this question, and to stare through fuzzy tangles of hair, eyebrow, and whisker at his small friend, whom he gradually recognized.

"Oh, it be ye, be it?" he grunted then, not unkindly. "Ye went to Scotland, didn't ye, awhile sen?"

"Yes," said Boy. "And—and—next week I'm going away again,—to school."

“That's right!” said Rattling Jack approvingly. “That's the best thing for yer! There be nothin' like a good English school for boys——”.

“But it isn't an English school!” said Boy. “I'm going to France——”.

“Fra—ance!” roared the old seaman. “What d'ye know of France?”

“Nothing!” said Boy dispiritedly. “[illegible]all be all alone out there,—and I don't speak a word of French!”

Rattling Jack surveyed him for a few minutes in grim silence. The situation appeared to interest him, for he unslung his basket and set it down on the shore. Whatever the basket's business, it was evident it could wait. Then partly straightening himself with an effort, he said slowly,—

“Who be sending ye to school in France?”

“My mother,” responded Boy.

“Poor little devil! May God help yer,” said Rattling Jack with hoarse solemnity; “for ye'll come back never no more!”

“Oh yes; I shall come back for the holidays, I suppose,” said Boy practically.

“Stow that!” said Jack, with a sudden stentorian vigour which was quite alarming. “What's 'olidays! Yes, ye'll come back mebbe for 'olidays, but it won't be you!”

“Won't be me?” echoed Boy wonderingly. “It must be me!”

"It can't be!" persisted Jack,—"France ain't a turnin'-out establishment for Englishmen. Never a bit of it! Ye'll go to France a poor decent little chap enough as yer seems to be, but ye'll never come back *that* way,—ye'll come back a little mincin', lyin' rascal, parly-vooin' like a hass, an' hoppin' like a frog! That's what ye'll be. Ye'll be afraid of cold water, and skeered-like at the sight of yer own skin—and ye'll never look any livin' creetur in the face agin! And ye'll be a dirty, mean, creepy-crawly little Frenchy—that's what ye'll be!"

"No, I won't!" cried Boy, quite appalled at this vivid picture of himself *in futuro*. "Don't say I will! I know you've travelled a lot, and that you've seen France——"

"Seen France!" And Rattling Jack snorted indignation at the air. "Rather! And seen Frenchmen too! And licked them into the bottom of their own shinin' boots! Seen France! Yes!—it's a great place for frogs—hoppin' round, and all alive oh!

> Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
> How does your garden grow?

Thank you marm, kindly, but frogs 'as eaten me out of 'ouse and 'ome an' garden too! Hor—hor—hor!"

And Rattling Jack began to indulge in those deep, uncouth sounds which he produced as laughter. Always deeply impressed by his own wit, he liked

to appreciate any joke he thought he had perpetrated to its full extent and flavour, and Boy waited patiently till his 'hor—hor—hor' decreased in volume and died away in a snuffle.

"Yes, I'm sure you're quite right about France," he then said timidly—"because you have been there. But you see, I can't help it. I shall have to go there if my mother sends me!"

Rattling Jack laid a big hand on Boy's small shoulder.

"Yes, I suppose you'll hev to do as yer mother bids. I don't know yer mother, and don't want to. If I did, mebbe I'd give her a bit o' my mind. What I thinks is this—that the ways of natur are best, and in the ways of natur mothers don't interfere when they've done their nussin'. See!" And he stretched out an arm with a roughly eloquent gesture towards the ocean, where the seagulls screamed and flew—"They birds has to take the rough-and-tumble of the storm and the sea. Born and bred in a hole of the cliffs, they've got to larn to fly—and larn they do,—and when they flies, they flies their own way—they takes it and they keeps it! And so with all birds and animals 'cept man. Man's the idiot of the universe, always a worritin' of himself. He wants his chillun to be just like himself, and a mussiful Lord makes 'em as different as chalk from cheese. For which let's be joyful! And when they wants to go their own way, man, the idiot, pulls 'em back,

and says, 'you shan't!' An' then it's more than likely old Nick steps in an' says, 'you shall!' And away they go, straight to the devil! When I was a boy I took my own way—and wal!—here I am!"

"And do you like yourself now?" asked Boy respectfully.

"Like myself? Of course I like myself! I ain't got no one else to like me, so why shouldn't I like myself?"

"*I* like you," said Boy,—"I always have liked you! I think you so—so clever!"

Rattling Jack was not often shaken from the cynical attitude he chose to assume towards all mankind, but this innocent remark certainly touched him in a weak spot. He was not insensible to flattery,—and the evident fact that Boy did not intend to flatter, but spoke with the simple conviction of his own heart, moved the old seafarer to a sudden stirring of more fervent feeling than was customary with him.

"Ye've a good deal o' sense for a little chap," he observed condescendingly, "and I don't mind sayin' that I've rather took to ye. Now, look'y 'ere! If ye don't want to go to school in France, why don't you do as they seagulls do, and fly away?"

"Fly away!" repeated Boy,—"you mean, run away!"

"Fly or run, it's all the same, bless yer 'eart!" said

Jack. "Get out of yer little hole in the rock and spread yer wings to the sun and the breeze! Hain't yer got any friends?"

"Yes, I've one very good friend," said Boy, thinking of Miss Letty. "She's a very kind lady, and I'm going to write to her. But you see if I ran away I should be brought back again—I'm not very old—I'm not quite ten yet."

"Not quite ten, ain't yer!" said Jack, suddenly becoming conscious of the extreme youth and helplessness of his small friend. "That ain't much, for sartin! Wal!—look 'ere,—I'll tell you what I'll do for ye—I'll give ye a tiger's tooth!"

Boy stared.

"Will you?" he said. "What's it for?"

"A tiger's tooth," said Jack solemnly, "takes the owner through the forests o' difficulty. A tiger's tooth protects him agin his enemies! Mark that! Take it with ye to France! A tiger's tooth bites traitors! A tiger's tooth! Lord love ye!—a'most anythin' can be done with a tiger's tooth! Look at it!"

He fumbled in his pocket, and pulled out a shining white object of pointed ivory.

"That come from Bengal," he said. "An' 'e as give it to me was what they call a ma-geesan! He could swallow sarpints and fire quite promiskus-like,—seemed his nat'ral food. An' 'e sed to me, ses 'e, ''Ere's a tiger's tooth for ye,—keep it in mem'ry of

the world-famous Oriental conjurer Garoo-Garee!' And then 'e guv a screech an' was gone!"

Boy listened to this interesting narrative with awe. "What a wonderful man!" he said. "And his name was Garoo-Garee!"

"Just that!" answered Jack. "Will ye have the tooth?"

"Indeed I will!" said Boy gratefully, taking the mystic talisman out of Jack's horny palm—"you're awfully good to me! I'm ever so much obliged! And if I have to go to France, I will come and see you directly I get back."

Rattling Jack shouldered his basket again slowly, and with difficulty.

"No, ye won't!" he said dismally. "No, ye won't think no more o' me among they Frenchies. God bless my 'eart! An' not yet ten ye ain't! Wal, good-bye to ye! I'll not be seein' ye agin in this mortal world,—so I'll just think o' ye kindly, as a little chap wot's dead!"

Boy's heart sank, and his young blood seemed to grow cold.

"Oh, don't do that, Jack!" he cried; "don't do that!"

"I must," said Jack with dreary gravity, looking a melancholy figure enough as he stood on the wet sand, with the gray storm-clouds scudding overhead, and the wind tossing his scanty white locks of hair. "For when a child is a child he's one thing—and

when he ain't, he's another. First there's a baby—then there ain't no baby, but a child,—and the baby's gone. Then by-and-by there ain't no child, but a boy—and the child's gone. Then, afore ye can so much as look round, the boy's gone, and there's a man. Argyfyin' my way, ye see baby, child, boy is all gone, which is to say, dead—for what's bein' dead but gone, and what's bein' gone but dead? And only the man is left, which is generally a poor piece of work. There's wise folk writin' in the newspapers wot calls it ever-lotion, but wot it is the lotion's good for, God only knows. Anyhow I've seen a darned sight many more decent chillun than I have men. Which it proves that the chillun is dead. But my talk is too deep for ye—I kin see that! Ye poor little skinny white-faced chap,—ye can't be expected to understan' Feel Osophy."

"No," said Boy humbly, "I'm afraid I don't quite understand. But I hope you'll think of me just as if I were here,—you see you have given me the tiger's tooth—and I shall never forget you!"

"M'appen the tooth will do somethin' in the way of nippin' the memory," said Jack thoughtfully,—"mebbe so! Good-bye t'yer! There's a cloud just a-goin' to burst in the sky, and ye'll be drenched to the skin afore ye knows where ye are!" and he turned up his quaint old physiognomy to the darkening heavens, from which already big drops of rain were beginning to fall. "Run 'ome, little 'un! Run 'ome! That

mother o' yourn 'll be down on ye if ye wets yer clothes. Shake 'ands?" For Boy had timidly extended his small hand. "Sartinly!" And the old man grasped the tiny child fingers within his own rough dirty ones. "For it's a long good-bye! Sartin sure of that I am! Don't let 'em make a frog of ye out there in France, if ye can 'elp it. Gord-bye! I'll just think o' ye as if ye were dead!"

The rain now began to fall in heavy earnest, and Boy could not stop to protest further against this obstinate final statement of his seafaring friend. He put the tiger's tooth in his pocket, smiled, lifted his cap, and ran, a little light figure flying across the sand, some of his curls escaping loose and gleaming like the sunshine that was now lacking in the sky. Rattling Jack stood still and watched him go, heedless of the rain that began to drift in sweeping gusts round and round him. The sea uprose and lashed the flat shore with fringes of yellow foam, angrily murmuring and snarling like some savage beast of prey. But Jack heard nothing, or if he heard, he did not heed. Equally he saw nothing, but that small child figure racing through the rain over the glistening sand, till at the corner of an old jetty where the mists of the land and sea hung low like a curtain, it turned and disappeared.

"There ye go!" said the old man, talking to himself—"there ye go—away for ever! An' the rain fallin', and the mists a-gatherin'. There ye go! The

way of all the chillun—a bit of sunshine, and then the mist and the rain! There ye go—and good-bye to ye! Ye wor a nice little chap—quiet, yet speerety-like—a nice little chap ye wor, an' I'll think o' ye kindly, as if the good God had took ye,—just as if ye wor dead!"



CHAPTER VII

THE next day Boy shut himself up in his own little bedroom and wrote a letter to Miss Leslie. He was a long time about it, and he took infinite pains to spell carefully. The result of his anxious thought and trouble was the following epistle:—

"MY DEER FREND MISS LETTY

I am gowin to skool nex week you will bee sory to heer it is not a skool in England like Alister Macdonald it is in France ware I have never bin I am sory to tell you I do not like to go thare. Mother expecs me to speek French but I am sory to tell you I do not feel I shall speek very quikly the new langwige if you cood do enny thing to safe me from the skool in France I wood be glad I am afrade Mother will send me before you can cum my close are been packt and I am to bee put on boord a ship to the Captain who is to give me to the skool I am very sory and cannot help cryin if I cood run away wood you meet me enny ware I wood like to see you I think of deer Skotland and Alister and Majer Desmond, pleese give my luv and say I have to go

to skool in France Alister will be very sory as he alwas sade he wood fite the french the plase is called Noirville (Boy wrote this very roundly and carefully) in Brittany and the master takes boys who are cheep mother says I am afrade I shal not see you deer miss Letty I am your lovin frend

BOY."

This letter finished, and put in an envelope, Boy carefully addressed it in a very big round hand to Miss Leslie at her house in Hans Place, and then went down to his mother to ask for a penny stamp.

"Whom have you been writing to?" she demanded, with a touch of suspicion.

For one instant Boy was tempted to answer,—"To Alister McDonald," but he resisted the temptation bravely. He had promised his dear Miss Letty never to tell a lie again after the fatal affair with the Major's gun. So he answered frankly,—

"To Miss Letty."

His mother dived into the depths of a capacious pocket, and opening a very bulgy purse, produced the required stamp.

"There you are," she said graciously; "I hope you have written her a nice letter."

"Oh yes, mother!"

"Well, leave it outside on the hall table. I have some letters to write too, and they can all go together."

Boy obeyed. He would have liked to go and post his letter himself, but his conscience told him that were he to ask to do so it would look like doubting his mother's integrity.

"It will be all right!" he said to himself, though there was just a little sinking at his heart as he placed it where he had been told. "Mother wouldn't touch it."

He hung about for a while, looking at the precious epistle, which to him involved so much, till, hearing his little shuffling feet in the hall, Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir grew impatient.

"Boy!" she called.

"Yes, mother."

"Come here. I want you to wind off this worsted for me."

Boy went to her, and meekly accepted the thick hank of ugly grey wool she offered him, and stretching it out, as was his custom when he had to do this kind of duty, on the back of a chair, he set to work patiently winding it off into a ball. Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir meanwhile wrote two letters, and sealed them in their respective envelopes. Then she took them out into the hall, and Boy heard her call the servant to take all the letters to the post.

"Is mine gone too?" he asked, as she re-entered.

"Of course! Do you think your mother could be so careless as to forget it?"

Boy said nothing, but went on winding the grey

worsted till he had made a neat, soft, big round of it,—then he handed it to his mother and ventured to kiss her cheek.

"My own Boy!" she said gushingly. "You do love me, don't you?"

"Yes, mother. Only—only——"

"Only what?"

"I wish you were sending me to a school in England. I don't like going to France!"

"That's because you don't know what is for your good, dear!" said Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, with a magnificent air. "Trust to mother! Mother always does everything for the best!"

Boy made no answer, but presently went away to his room and took down a book in large print, which Major Desmond had given him as a parting gift, entitled "Our Country's Heroes,"—in which there were some very thrilling pictures of young men, almost boys, fighting, escaping from prison, struggling with wild beasts, climbing Alpine heights, swimming tempestuous seas, and generally distinguishing themselves,—and as he turned the pages, he wondered wistfully whether he would ever be like any one of them. He feared not; there was no encouragement held out to him to be a "country's hero."

"Alister McDonald will be doing great things some day, I'm sure!" he said to himself. "He's full of most wonderful ideas about killing all the country's enemies!"

And while he thus pored over his book and thought, his mother opened his poor little letter to Miss Leslie ("For it is a mother's duty!" she said to herself, to excuse her dishonourable act to a trusting child) and read every word two or three times over. She had of course never intended it to be posted, and when she had gone into the hall to apparently give the servant all the letters for the post, she had kept it back and quietly slipped it into her pocket. As she now perused it, her whole large figure swelled with the "noble matron's" indignation.

"What a wicked old thing that Leslie woman must be!" she exclaimed,—"A perfect mischief-maker!—she has poisoned my son's mind! He would evidently run away to her if he could! How fortunate it is that I have intercepted this letter! Not that it matters much, because of course I should have soon put a stop to the old maid's nonsense, and Boy's too. Stupid child! But it isn't his fault, poor darling—it's the fault of that conceited old thing who has put all these foolish notions into his head. Really, a mother has to be always on her guard!"

With which sagacious observation, she posted Boy's letter to his "deer frend" into the fire. Then, satisfied that she "had done a mother's duty," she called Boy, and asked him if he would like a game of draughts with her. He nodded a glad assent, and as he brought out the board and set the pieces, he looked so bright and animated that his mother

"swelled" towards him as it were, and shed one of her slowest, fattest smiles upon him.

"I shall be very lonely without you, Boy!" she said plaintively,—"No nice little son to play draughts with me! But it's for your good, I know, and a mother must always sacrifice herself for her children."

She sighed in bland self-admiration, but Boy, not being able to argue on the duties of mothers, had already made his first move on the draught-board, so she had to resign herself with as good a grace as she could to the game, which she had only proposed by way of a *ruse* to take Boy's mind off any further possibility of its dwelling on the subject of his letter to Miss Leslie.

But Boy thought of it all the same, though he said nothing. Day after day he waited anxiously for a reply,—and when none came, his little face grew paler, and his brows contracted the habit of frowning. One morning when his mother was just opening some letters of her own which had arrived by the first delivery, she looked up and said smilingly,—

"Have you heard from Miss Letty yet, Boy?"

Boy looked at her with a straight fearless glance, which, had she been a little less mean and treacherous and poor of soul than she was, might have made her wince.

"No, mother!"

"What a shame!" and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir settled herself more comfortably in her chair, still smiling.

"But you see, she's getting rather an old lady now, and she can hardly be expected to write to little boys!"

"She promised me she would always answer me if I wrote to her!" said Boy, his small mouth set and stern, and his eyes looking quite tired and pained—"She *promised*!"

"And you believed her?" his mother queried carelessly. "Poor dear child! Yes, of course! So nice of you! But you will have to learn, dear, as you grow older, that people don't always keep their promises!"

"I can't think Miss Letty would ever break hers!" said Boy slowly.

His mother laughed unkindly.

"What a touching faith you have in her!" she said, and laughed again. "Such a little boy!—and quite in love with such an old lady! Oh, go along, Boy! Don't be silly! You really are too absurd! Miss Letty has got quite enough to do with counting up her money and looking after the interest of it, without bothering to write to *you*!"

"Is she very rich?" asked Boy suddenly.

"Rich? I should think she is indeed! Do you know"—and she smiled blandly—"she wanted to give you all the money she has got!"

"Me!" exclaimed Boy, and stared breathlessly.

"Yes—you! But then you would have had to go away from me, and be like *her* son instead of *mine*!

That would have been quite dreadful! And of course I could not have allowed such a thing!"

Boy said not a word. He grew a little paler still, but was quite silent.

"And then," went on Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir graciously, "you would have had all her thousands of pounds when she was dead!"

This word broke up Boy's unnatural composure.

"Dead! When she was dead! Oh, I don't want Miss Letty to die!" he said, the colour rushing up hotly to his brows. "No—no! I don't want any money——I wouldn't have it—not if Miss Letty had to die first! I would rather die myself!"

And unable to control his rising emotion, he suddenly burst into tears and ran out of the room.

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir gazed after him helplessly. Then rising, she paced the room slowly to and fro with elephantine tread, and sniffed the air portentously.

"He's getting quite unmanageable! I'm thankful—yes, thankful that I have decided on that school in Brittany, and the sooner he goes the better!"

Meanwhile Boy was crying quietly, and by himself, in his room.

"Oh, Miss Letty!" he sobbed—"Dear Miss Letty! You wanted me to be *your* Boy! Oh, I wish I was!—I wish I was! Not for all the money—I don't want any—but I want *you*! I want *you*, Miss Letty! Oh, I do want you so much! I do want you!"

Alas, the Fates, so often invincibly obstinate in their particular way of weaving the web of a life, and sometimes tangling the threads as they go, were apparently set dead against any change for the better occurring in this child's destiny,—and no "occult" force of sound, or other form of spirit communication was vouchsafed to Miss Letty concerning the troubles and difficulties of her little friend. And the day came when Boy, to quote the ancient ballad of Lord Bateman,

> "Shipped himself all aboard of a ship,
> Some foreign countries for to see."

A solitary little figure, he stood on the deck where his mother had left him after "seeing him off," somewhat doubtfully received and considered by the captain of the said ship as a sort of package, labelled, and needing speedy transit—and as he saw the white cliffs of England recede, his heart was heavy as lead, and his soul full of bitterness. Not for his mother or father were his farewells—but for Miss Letty. To her he sent his parting thoughts,—to her he silently breathed the last love, the last tenderness of his innocent childhood. For his trust in her remained unbroken. She would have answered his letter, he knew, if she had received it. He felt instinctively certain that it had never been posted,—and when once this idea took root in his young mind, it bore its natural fruit,—a deep distrust, which was almost scorn,

of the mother who could stoop so low as to deliberately deceive him. The incident made such a strong impression upon him, that it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that it "had aged him." He had never been able to respect his father,—and now he was moved to despise his mother. Hence his good-byes to her were cold and lifeless—the kiss he gave her was a mere touch—his little hand lay limply in hers—while she, in her sublime self-conceit, thought that this numb and frozen attitude of the child was the result of his grief at parting from her.

"See that he has a good dinner, please!" she said to the captain, in whose care she had placed him, heaving her large bosom expansively as she spoke—"Poor, dear little fellow! He's so terribly cut up at parting from me,—we have been such friends—such close companions! You will look after him, won't you?"

The captain grunted a brief assent, thinking what a remarkably stout woman she was,—and Boy smiled—such a pale, cold little smile—the first touch of the sarcasm that was destined to make his pretty mouth into such a hard line in a few more years. And the ship plunged away from the English shore through the grey-green foam-crested billows—and Boy leaned over the deck rail, and watched the churning water under the paddle-wheels, and the sea-birds swooping down in search of stray scraps of food thrown out from the ship's kitchen,—and he remembered what Rattling Jack had said about them—"Born and

bred in a hole of the cliffs, they've got to larn to fly—and larn they do—and when they flies, they flies their own way—they takes it an' they keeps it!"

And moved by an odd sense of the injurious treatment of an untoward Fate, he took out from his pocket the precious "tiger's tooth" the old sailor had given him as a talisman, and dropped it in the waves.

"For it's evidently not a bit of use," he said to himself; "Jack said it would take me through difficulties, but it hasn't. It has been no help to me at all. It's a humbug, like—like most things. And as for the sea-gulls, I'm sure the world is a better place for birds than boys. I wish I'd never been a boy."

But youthful wishes, like youthful hopes, are often vain, and doomed to annihilation through the cross-currents of opposing influences; and heedless of Boy's aching little heart, so full of crushed aspirations and disappointments, the ship went on and bore him relentlessly away from everything in which he had the faintest interest. And while he was on his journey to France, his estimable "Muzzy" sat down at home, and in high satisfaction and importance, wrote two letters. One was to the Master of the "skool" at Noirville, as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,

My son has left England to-day so that he will arrive in time to meet your representative at St. Malo, where I understand you will send to receive

him. I have no further instructions respecting his education to give you, except to ask you to kindly supervise his letters. He has a young friend named Alister McDonald, son of Colonel McDonald, who is of very good family, to whom he may wish to write, and I have no objection whatever to his doing so. But there is an elderly person named Miss Leslie, who has an extremely unfortunate influence upon his mind, and I shall be obliged to you if you will intercept any letters he may attempt to write to her and forward them to me.

Mes meilleurs compliments!

AMELIA D'ARCY-MUIR."

The other was to Miss Leslie.

"MY DEAR LETITIA,

I am sure you will be glad to hear that dear Boy has gone to school. I have sent him to a very good establishment in Noirville, Brittany, where he will pick up French very quickly, and languages are so necessary to a boy nowadays. He left his love for you, and told me to say good-bye to you for him. I hope you are quite well, and that this rather damp weather is not affecting your spirits. I am of course rather lonely without my darling son, but to be a good mother one must always suffer something.

Sincerely yours,

AMELIA D'ARCY-MUIR."

It was with a curious sense of self-congratulation that she posted these two letters, and thought of the result they would effect. The one to the French schoolmaster would subject Boy to a sort of *espionage*, which would, she decided, be "good for him,"—it was part of "a mother's duty" to make a child feel that he was watched and suspected and mistrusted, and that every innocent letter he wrote was under "surveillance" as if he were a prisoner of war,—and the one to Miss Letty would cause that good and gentle creature such grief and consternation as made the worthy Amelia D'Arcy-Muir wriggle with pleasure to contemplate. She was one of those very common types of women who delight in making other women unhappy, and who approve of themselves for doing an unkindness as though it were a virtue. There was nothing she liked better than to meet some sour old beldame-gossip and talk with a sort of condescending pity of some beautiful or well-known person completely out of her sphere, as if the said person were an ancient hooded crow. To pick a reputation to pieces was one of her delights,—to make mischief in households, another,—and to create confusion and discord where, till her arrival, all had been peace, was an ecstacy whose deliciousness to her soul almost approached surfeit. She always said her disagreeable things in the softest accents, as though she were imparting a valuable secret,—and when an inextricably hopeless muddle of affairs among perfectly harmless

people had come about through her interference, she put on a grand air of protesting innocence, and looked "like Niobe all tears." But in secret she hugged herself with joy to think what trouble she had managed to work up out of nothing,—hence her mood was one of the smoothest, most suave satisfaction, as she pictured Miss Letty's face of woe when she heard that Boy had gone away out of England! She ordered a dozen native oysters, and had a pint of champagne for supper, by way of outward expression for her inward comfort—and enjoyed these luxuries doubly because of the delighted consciousness she had that Miss Letty was unhappy.

And she was right enough. Poor Miss Leslie was indeed unhappy. When she received Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir's letter, her astonishment and regret knew no bounds.

"Boy gone to school in France!" she exclaimed—"In France!"

And the tears sprang to her eyes. She read the news again and yet again.

"Oh, poor Boy!" she murmured,—"Why didn't you write to me! And yet—— if his mother was obstinately resolved upon such a scheme I could have done nothing. But—to send him to France!"

She thought over it, and worried about it all the morning, and finally sent a brief telegram to Major Desmond at his club, asking him to call and see her that afternoon about tea-time if he had nothing more

important to do. And the Major, thinking Letty must be ill or she never would have wired for him, took a hansom straight away, and arrived to luncheon instead of to tea.

"Oh, Dick!" said Miss Letty at once as she gave him her hand in greeting,—"I have such bad news about Boy! They have sent him away to school in France!"

The Major stared.

"France!" he echoed blankly.

"Yes—France! To a place called Noirville in Brittany. Poor child! Here is his mother's letter." And she gave him Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir's communication.

He read it in visible impatience,—then he threw it down upon the table angrily.

"That woman is a fiend, Letty!" he said,—"A devil encased in fat! That's what she is! If she had been thin, she would have been a Murderess—as it is, she's a Muddler! A criminal Muddler!" He walked up and down the room wrathfully—then stopped in front of Miss Leslie, whose gentle face was pale, and her eyes were suspiciously moist.

"Now, Letty, listen to me! Be a man!—I mean, be a brave woman!—and look this thing in the face You must say good-bye to Boy for ever!"

"Say good-bye to Boy for ever!" repeated Miss Leslie mechanically—"Must I?"

"Yes, you must!" said the Major with an attempt

at sternness,—"Don't you see? The child has gone —and he'll never come back. *A* boy will come back, but not the boy *you* knew. The boy you knew is practically dead. Try to realize that, Letty! It's very hard, I know—but it's a fact. The poor little chap had enough against him in his home surroundings, God knows!—but a cheap foreign school is the last straw on the camel's back. Whatever is good in his nature will go to waste,—whatever is bad will grow and flourish!"

Miss Letty said nothing. She sat down and clasped her hands together to control their nervous trembling.

"An English school," went on Desmond, "might have been the saving of Boy. He would have been taught there that death is preferable to dishonour. But at a foreign school he'll learn that to tell lies prettily, and to cheat with elegance, are cardinal points in a gentleman's conduct. And there are other things besides,—No, Letty!—no—it's no good you fretting yourself! Say good-bye to Boy—and say it for ever!"

He came and bent over her, and took one of the delicate trembling hands in his own.

"You have said good-bye to so many hopes and joys, Letty!" he said, with deep tenderness in his kind voice—"and said it so bravely and unrepiningly, that you must not lose courage now. It's just one more disappointment—that's all. Think of Boy as a

child—the coaxing little rascal who used to call you 'Kiss-Letty'"—he paused a moment—then went on—"And you will get accustomed after a bit to believe he has gone to Heaven. You know you'll never see that little winsome child again,—there was hardly anything of him left in the boy who came to visit you in Scotland. But you had the last of his childhood there, Letty,—be satisfied! Say good-bye!"

Miss Letty looked up at the honest sympathising face of her staunch old friend, and tried to smile.

"No, Dick, I don't think I'll do that," she said gently—"I don't think I can. You see I may perhaps be able to help Boy in some way later on——"

"There's no doubt you will if you're inclined to, and that he'll need help," said the Major somewhat grimly—"But what I mean, Letty, is that you must put away all your fancies about him. Don't idealize him any more. Don't think that he will be an exceptional sort of fellow, or turn out brilliantly as a noble example to the world in general,—because he won't. There's no hope in that quarter. And—if you take my advice, you'll stop thinking about him for the present, and make up your mind to join me and a few friends who are going out to the States. Come to America, Letty,—come along! And I'll try and find another Boy for you!"

Miss Leslie shook her head.

"That's impossible!" she said sorrowfully,—"I'm very conservative in my affections."

"I know that!" said the Major dolefully—"By Jove! I know that!"

He was silent, looking at her wistfully, and tugging at his white moustache.

"Letty, I say!" he broke out presently—"I'm getting an old man, you know,—I shall soon be turning up my toes to the daisies—will you not do *me* a kindness?"

"Why, of course I will if I can, Dick!" she answered readily—"What is it?"

"Come to America! There's a little orphan niece of mine,—Violet Morrison—only child of my old pal Jack Morrison of the Guards—he married my youngest sister—both of 'em dead—and only this little girl left. She's just twelve, and I want her to finish her education in America, where they honour bright women instead of despising them. But I don't want to leave you behind. Come and play Auntie to her, will you?"

"Do you really want me?" Miss Leslie asked anxiously—"Should I be useful?"

"Useful! You would be worth more than your weight in gold—as you always are! Come and chaperone Violet—she hasn't got a soul in the world except me to care a button for her. You'll do no good brooding here by yourself in London, and wondering how Boy is getting on in France. You had much better come and be happy in giving happiness to others."

"Do you think Boy might write to me?" she asked hesitatingly.

"He might—but it's more than possible his letter would never reach you. And if you wrote to him, it's ten to one whether your letter would ever reach *him*. They spy on boys in foreign schools, and report everything to their parents. Anyhow, if he did write to you here at this address, the letter would be forwarded. Don't hesitate, Letty! Come to America and help me take care of Violet! Say yes!"

"When do you start?"

"In a week."

Miss Letty thought a moment.

"Very well, Dick. I certainly have no ties to keep me in England. I know you mean it kindly. I'll come and look after your niece. It will give me something to do."

"Of course it will!" said the Major, delighted—"Letty, you're a brick!"

She laughed a little, but her eyes were sad.

"Dick!" she said.

"Letty!"

"Don't ask me to forget Boy! I can't!"

The Major raised her hand to his lips and kissed it.

"All right, I won't. But I didn't ask you to forget the child. No. He was a charming child. But—he's gone!"

"Yes," said Miss Letty with a sigh—"He's gone."

And she did not answer Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir's letter, nor did she write to Boy.

The following week she started for New York with the Major and his niece, a pretty, bright little girl who was completely fascinated by Miss Letty's charm and gentleness, and who obeyed her implicitly with devotion and tenderness at once,—and the only intimation Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir received of her departure was through a letter to her husband from Major Desmond, which of course she opened. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR D'ARCY,

I'm off to America with a party of two or three friends, including Miss Leslie, who is kindly chaperoning my young niece Violet Morrison, whom I am going to place at a finishing school in New Jersey. I daresay you remember Jack Morrison of the Guards—this is his only child,—and I prefer an American education for girls to an English one. I hear your little chap has been sent to school in France—it's a d——d shame to try and turn an upright-standing Briton into a French frog. Better by far have sent him to one of the first-class educational establishments in the States. However, I suppose your wife has different ideas to anyone else respecting the education of boys. Take my advice and don't drink yourself into the lower regions—look after your own affairs, and attend to the education of the little chap whose appearance and conduct in this world you are answer-

able for. If he ever goes to the bad, it won't be half as much his fault as yours. I always speak my mind, as you know—and I'm doing it now.

Yours truly,

DICK DESMOND."

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir bridled with offence as she read these lines, but she put them calmly into her usual posting-place for other people's letters—the fire,—and for once she was exceedingly annoyed. Her ordinary bland state of complacent self-satisfaction was seriously disturbed. Miss Leslie, instead of writing to express her grief and distress at Boy's departure—instead of doing anything that she was expected to do—had actually packed up her things and gone to America! Did any one ever hear of such a thing! And who could tell!—she might take a fancy to Major Desmond's niece and leave her all her money! And Boy would be done out of it! For this flabby-minded, inconsistent woman had convinced herself that Boy must inevitably be Miss Leslie's heir in the long run. And now here was a most unexpected turn to affairs.

That night she wrote to Boy a letter in which the following passage occurred:—

"I do not think Miss Leslie is as fond of you as she professed to be, for she has never said one word about your going to school, or sent you any message.

I hear she has gone to America with Major Desmond's little niece, who is being taken out there to finish her education. It seems a funny place to send an English girl to school, but I suppose the Major thinks he knows best."

Boy read this with the weary scorn that was becoming habitual with him. If America was a funny place to send an English girl to school at, he thought France was a still funnier place for an English boy. And Miss Letty "was not so fond of him as she professed to be," wasn't she? Boy thought he knew better. But if he was mistaken, it did not matter much. Nothing mattered now! He didn't care! Not he! It was foolish to care about anything or anybody. So one of his schoolmates told him,—a wiry boy from Paris with dark eyes, curly black hair, and a trick of smiling at nothing, and shrugging his shoulders.

"*Qu'est que c'est la vie?*" this youthful satirist would say. "*C'est vieux jeu!—bagatelle! Ouf! Une farce! Une comédie! Tout passe—tout casse! —et Dieu s'amuse!*"

And Boy shrugged his shoulders likewise and smiled at nothing, and said,—

"*Qu'est que c'est la vie? Une comédie! Et Dieu s'amuse!*"

CHAPTER VIII

THE steady pulse of time, which goes on mercilessly beating with calm inflexibility, regardless of all the lesser human pulses that hurriedly beat with it for a little while and then cease for ever, had measured out six whole years since Boy went to "skool" in France, and he was now sixteen, and also one of the foremost scholars at a well-known English military school. He had stayed in France for over a year, his mother having gone there to spend his holidays with him, rather than allow him to return to England and "spoil his French accent," as she said. Poor Boy! He never had much of an accent, and what he learned of French was very soon forgotten when he came home. But what he learned of morals in France was not forgotten, and took deep root in his character. When he came back to England he found his father settled in London again, and bent on a sudden new scheme of education for him. The Honourable Jim was beginning to suffer severely from his constant unlimited potations; he was looking very bloated and heavy, and his eyes had an unpleasant fixed glare in them occasionally, which to

a medical observer, boded no good. He had almost died in one bad fit of delirium tremens, and it was during the gradual process of his recovery from this attack, when in a condition of maudlin sentiment and general shakiness, that he decided on a public military training school as the next element in Boy's education.

"Poor little chap!" he whimpered to the physician who had just blandly told him that he would be dead on whisky in two years,—"Poor little chap I've been a bad father to him, doctor,—yes, I have—d——n it! I've left his bringing up to my wife—and she's a d——d fool—always was—married her for her looks; ain't much of 'em now, eh? ha-ha! all gone to seed! Well, well!—we're here to-day and gone to-morrow!" and he rolled his confused head to and fro on his pillows, smiling feebly,—"That's what the old-fashioned clowns used to say in the old-fashioned pantomimes. But by Jove! I'll turn over a new leaf—Boy shall be properly educated, d——n it! He shall!"

So he swore—and so he resolved, and for once carried his way over the expostulations of his wife, who had some other "scheme" in view for "my son's advancement," but what scheme it was she was unable to state clearly. No such idea crossed either of their minds as the fact that Boy was already educated, so far as character and susceptibility of temperament were concerned. Both

father and mother were too ignorant to realize that whatever good or bad there was in his disposition, was already too fully developed to be either checked or diverted from its course. And when the lad went to the school decided upon, it was with exactly the same weariness, indifference and cynicism with which he had gone to France. He had a bright brain, and soon became fully conscious of his powers. He mastered his lessons easily,—and as he had a sort of dogged determination to stand high in his classes, he succeeded. But his success gave him no joy. His vague fancies about the great possibilities of life, had all vanished. In the French school, among the boys of all ages and dispositions he met there, he had learned that the chief object of living was to please one's Self. To do all that seemed agreeable to one's Self—and never mind the rest! For example,—one could believe in God as long as one wished to,—but when this same God did not arrange things as suited one's Self, then let God go. And Boy took this lesson well to heart,—it coloured and emphasized all the other "subjects" for which he "crammed" steadily, filling up his exam. papers and gaining thousands of marks for the parrot-like proficiency in such classical forms of study as were bound to be of no use whatever to him in the practical business of life. He was training to be an officer—and in consequence of this, was learning precisely everything an officer need not know. But

as this is too frequently the system of national education nowadays in all professions, particularly the military, the least said about it the better. Boy, like other boys, did just what he was ordered to do, learned just what he was required to learn, with steady dogged persistence but no enthusiasm, and spared no pains to grind himself down into the approved ordinary pattern of an English college boy, and for this he made a complete sacrifice of all his originality. His studies fagged him, but he showed nothing of his weariness, and equally said nothing. He grew thin and tall and weak and nervous-looking —and one of the chief troubles of his life was his mother. Always dutiful to her, he did his best to be affectionate,—for he was old enough now to feel very sorry for her,—sorry and ashamed as well. Truth to tell, the most casual stranger looking at Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, could not but feel a timid reluctance to be seen in her company. Always inclined to fat, she had grown fatter than ever,—always loving slothful ease, she had grown lazier; her clothes were a mere bundle hooked loosely round her large form, and with ill-cut, non-fitting garments, she affected a "fashionable" hat, which created a wild and almost alarming effect whenever she put it on. Boy blushed deeply each time he saw her thus arrayed. In fact he often became painfully agitated when passers-by would stare at his mother with a derisive smile,—always

over-sensitive, he could scarcely keep the tears out of his eyes. He lived in terror lest she should fulfil her frequently expressed intention of visiting his college to see the cricket matches or sham fights which often took place in the grounds—for if she did come, he would have to walk about with her and introduce her perhaps to some of his school-fellows. He dreaded this possibility, for he could not but compare her with the neat, and even elegantly dressed ladies who came at stated times to the school, and were proudly presented by various boys to their masters as "my mother." How dreadful it would be if he had to own that the large lolling bundle of clothes, wispy hair and foolish face was "my mother"! It was not as if she had not the means to be tidy,—she had,—and as Boy often noticed, even some of the poorest women kept themselves clean and sweet. Why could not his mother look as tidy for instance as their own servant-maid when she went out on Sunday? He could not imagine. And he dared not ask her to be more careful of her personal appearance in order to save him shame; she would of course take the suggestion as a piece of gross impertinence.

And did he ever think of Miss Letty? Yes,—often and often he thought of her, but in a dull, hopeless, far-away fashion, as of one who had passed out of his life, never to be seen again. Ages seemed to have rolled by since his childhood,—and the face and figure of his old friend were pretty nearly as dimly indistinct

in his memory as the shape and look of his once adored cow "Dunny." He heard of her now and then,—for her course of life and action had considerably astonished and irritated Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, who frequently found occasion to make unkind remarks on the "fads" of that "silly old maid." However, Miss Letty had no "fads,"—she merely made it a rule to be useful wherever she could,—and if she thought she saw a line of work and duty laid down for her to follow, she invariably followed it. When she had gone out to the States with Major Desmond as temporary chaperone to his niece, she met with so much kindness and hospitality from the Americans,—so much instant appreciation of her good breeding, grace and fine qualities, that she was quite affected by it,—and she had only been two or three months in New York, when she found to her amazement and gratitude that she had hosts of friends. Young girls adored her,—young men came to her with their confidences,—and all the elder women, married and unmarried, came round her, attracted by her sweetness, tactfulness, simplicity of manner and absolute sincerity. "Our English Miss Letty" was her new sobriquet,—and Major Desmond's young niece, Violet Morrison, always called her "my own Miss Letty." Violet was a very sweet, engaging child, and when she went to the school in New Jersey selected for her, she said to her uncle coaxingly on the day he left her there,—

"Wouldn't it be nice if Miss Letty lived over here while I am at school? I could always go to her for my holidays then."

The Major pinched her soft round cheek and kissed her and called her a "little baggage,"—did she suppose, he asked, that Miss Letty was going to absent herself from England all that while just to make holidays for a chit of a girl? But he thought about the matter a good deal, not from any selfish point of view, but solely on account of the happiness of the dear woman he had secretly loved so long, and whom he meant to love to the end. Sitting meditatively in one of the luxurious New York clubs, of which, with the ready courtesy Americans show to their stranger-visitors, he had been made an honorary member, the Major turned Miss Letty's position over in his mind. She was all alone in the world, and though she was rich, he knew her nature well enough to be sure that in her case riches did not compensate for solitude. She had certain friends in England,—but none of them were half as sympathetic, warm-hearted or kindly, as those she had made so quickly in America. She had been disappointed in her love for Boy,—and if she tried to intervene in the further disposition of his fate, she would probably be disappointed again. Now here, in America, was Violet,—studying hard to become a bright, clever, sweet woman,—to learn to talk well and to know thoroughly what she was talking about —not to be a mere figure-head of femininity, just

capable of wearing a gown and having a baby. Something more than that was demanded for Violet,—the Major wanted her to be brought up to understand the beauty and satisfaction of an impersonal life—a life that should widen, not narrow with experience,—and who could be a more faithful home instructress of unselfishness and virtue than Miss Letty? Yes; it would certainly mean a great and lasting benefit to Violet if she could have the blessing of Miss Letty's influence and affectionate guidance in the opening out of her young life. And what of Miss Letty herself?

"Give that dear woman something to do for somebody else," mused the Major, "and she's perfectly happy. It's only for herself she doesn't care to do anything. Now I shall make her life best worth living, if I can fill it with duties—that is, if I can only persuade her to accept the duties."

And after some further cogitation he went to Miss Letty and explained himself thoroughly, with, as he thought, a most artful and painstaking elaboration of his young niece's position,—how hard it was for her to be without some one of her own sex to look after her, deprived as she was of a mother's influence and example, and so on and so on, till Miss Letty suddenly stopped him in his eloquent harangue by a little shake of her hand, and an uplifted finger of protest.

"Dick!" she said, with a sparkle in her eyes

suggestive of a dewdrop and sunbeam in one—"You are a dear old humbug!"

The Major started and blushed,—yes, actually blushed. He had considered himself a wonderful diplomatist, able to prepare a scheme of so deep and wily a nature that the most astute person would never be able to fathom it, and after all his crafty preparations, his plan turned out to be so transparent that a simple woman could see through it at once! He wriggled on his chair uneasily, coughed, and looked distinctly taken aback, while Miss Letty went on,—

"Yes, you are a dear old humbug, Dick!" she said, "And a good kind friend as well! It is not for Violet's sake that you want me to stay over this side of ocean for a while, for there are hundreds of nice women here who would be only too pleased to have the child pass her holidays with them and their daughters, —no, Dick!—it isn't for Violet's sake half so much as it is for mine! I see that,—and I understand your good heart. You think I am a lonely old body—getting older quickly every day—and that the more friends I have, and the greater the interest I can take in other lives than my own, the better it will be for me. And you're right, Dick! I'm not a fool, and I hope I am neither obstinate nor selfish. I see what you mean! You are very clear, my dear friend,—clear as crystal! I have not known you all these years for nothing. I honour and admire you, Dick,

and if I didn't go by your advice pretty often, I should be the most ungrateful creature under the sun. The only interest I have—or had—in England, apart from my natural love of home, is Boy,—but it is quite evident his mother doesn't wish me to interfere with him, so I'm better out of the way. And the long and the short of it is, Dick, I'll do just what you wish me to do!"

"Hooray, hooray!" cried the Major ecstatically. "Oh, Letty, Letty, what a wife you would have made! And it's not too late even now. Won't you have me? We're too old to play Romeo and Juliet, but we can play Darby and Joan!"

In his excitement, Desmond had risen, and leaning behind Miss Letty's chair, had slipped an arm round her, and now with one hand he turned up the dear face, so delicate, so little wrinkled, so tenderly shaped by approving Time into the sweetest of sweet expressions. The faintest pink coloured the pale cheeks at this impulsive caress of her old and faithful adorer.

"Dick, if I did not believe, as I do, that God always brings true lovers together again after death, I should say 'yes' to you, and do my best, old woman as I am, to be a companion to you for the rest of your life, and make your home cosy and comfortable; but you see I gave my promise to Harry before he went to India, that I would never marry any one but himself. He died true—and so must I!"

Never was the poor Major more bitterly and sorely

tempted than at that moment. With all his heart he longed to tell the gentle trusting creature how utterly unworthy this same "Harry" had always been of such pure devotion,—he wanted to say that the person likely to "die true" was himself, and that the dead man she idolized did not merit a day's regret,—but the strong sense of honour in the gallant old man held him silent, though he bit his lips hard to check the outburst of truth which threatened to rise and overcome his self-control. If he told her all, he would be doing two things that were in his estimation villainous,—first, he would be taking away a dead man's character, and secondly, he would be destroying a good woman's lifelong faith. No,—it was impossible—he could not, would not do it. He gave a deep sigh,—then patted Miss Letty's white forehead gently and smoothed the silver hair.

"Have your own way, my dear!" he said resignedly, "Have your own way! I ought to be contented to have you as my friend, without hankering after you as a wife. I am a selfish old rascal,—that's what's the matter with me. Forget and forgive!"

"There's nothing to either forget and forgive, Dick," she said quickly, and with a sense of compunction, giving him her hand, which he kissed tenderly, though "Harry's" engagement-ring still sparkled on it,—"I don't deserve all your affection,—but I don't mind telling you I should be very much unhappier than I am, without it!"

"Well, that's something!" said the Major, beginning to smile again, and walking up and down the room,—"That's what we may call a bit of heartsease. And now if you are going to do exactly what I want you to do, I suggest that you should take a pretty house on Long Island,—one of those charming and luxurious villas with big gardens, where you can roam about and enjoy yourself,—and let me cross the herring-pond for you and see to the letting of your place in England. You can do something advantageous with it for a year or two, and till that time you might tour through America and see everything worth seeing. And when I have transacted your business I will attend to my own, come out here again, and enjoy myself too!"

And so,—after more discussion, it was finally decided, and so,—much to the pleasure of Miss Letty's numerous friends in America, it was finally arranged. And "our English Miss Letty" established herself in a beautiful house elegantly furnished, whose windows commanded a fine view of the sea, and which was surrounded by gardens full of wonderful flowers, such as are never seen in England, and a conservatory still more gorgeously supplied,—and though she missed the songs of the sweet English birds, the skylark, the blackbird, the thrush, and the familiar robin, she still had sufficient natural beauty about her to be in her own quiet way thankful for life and its privileges. She began to have serious thoughts of making her

home for good in America, for Violet gathered about her such an assemblage of bright young people, and she herself was so much in demand, that she often wondered how it would ever be possible for her to escape from so many pleasant ties and go back to England again. She had written to Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, giving her address and stating something of her future intentions,—but had received no reply. And Boy never wrote to her at all. But she was not very much surprised at that, as it was most likely his mother would not tell him where she was. And so time flew on insensibly, one year after another, and Violet Morrison, from a little girl, grew up into a pretty maiden of seventeen summers,—graceful and gentle—clever, good, true, and devoted to Miss Letty, who loved her as a daughter, though her old affection for Boy never grew cold. Boy as she knew him,—Boy with all his little droll, pretty ways as a child,—Boy with his sad, wistful, old-fashioned manner, the result of home drawbacks, when he came to see her in Scotland, after which she had lost him for good,—Boy was still the secret idol of her heart next to "Harry," whose image remained the centre of that inmost shrine. She could not picture Boy at all as a lad of fifteen—to her he was always a child; and on a little bracket near the chair where she was accustomed to sit every day with her needlework, there always stood the only two mementoes she had of him—the toy cow "Dunny," unchanged in aspect,

which he had viewed with such indifference in Scotland, and had left behind him there; and the little pair of shabby shoes, the souvenirs of the first time he ever stayed with her.

One day Violet Morrison asked her uncle about these mysterious relics.

"Why does Miss Letty keep that funny toy cow and those little shoes always beside her?"

Major Desmond puffed at his cigar, and surveyed his niece's pretty rounded figure, bright face and sweet expression with much inward satisfaction. He met her question with another.

"Have you ever asked her?"

Violet blushed.

"No, I don't think it's good taste to ask people about their little fancies. One may hurt them quite unintentionally. And I wouldn't hurt darling Miss Letty for the world!"

"That's right, child!" said the Major—"You have the true feeling. But there is not much mystery about that toy cow or those shoes. Miss Letty, bless her heart, has no deep secrets in her life. The cow and the shoes belonged to a little chap named Robert D'Arcy-Muir, but generally called 'Boy.' She loved him very much, and wanted to adopt him; but his mother would not let her—and so—and so—she has got the cow and the shoes, and that's all that's left of him!"

"I see!" murmured Violet, and her pretty eyes

grew moist. After a pause she said, "I suppose she could not love me as she loved Boy?"

"She loves you very much," answered the Major discreetly.

"Yes—but not as she loved Boy! I was never quite a little child with her. I think"—and the girl's fair face grew very serious—"if you once love a little child, you must always love it!"

"What, even if the child disappears altogether into a boy, and then into a man?—and perhaps an unpleasant man?" queried the Major with some amusement. But Violet did not smile.

"Yes—I think so," she replied. "You see, you can never forget—if you ever knew—that though he may be grown into a man—perhaps a bad man—still he was a dear little child once! That's what makes mothers so patient, I'm sure!"

She turned away, not trusting herself to say any more,—for she had loved her own mother dearly, and had never quite got over her loss.

The Major took his cigar out of his mouth and looked at its end meditatively.

"How these young creatures think nowadays!" he said. "Dear me! I never used to think about anything when I was Violet's age. Life was all beer and skittles, as they say! I kicked about me like a young colt in a green pasture! Upon my word, I think that life is much too crowded with learning for the young folks in our present glorious

age of progress. They become positively metaphysical before they're twenty!"

Meanwhile Violet, whose heart was burdened with a secret which she was afraid to tell to her uncle, went in search of Miss Letty. It was a very warm day, though not as warm as summer days in America usually are, and the shadiest part of the house was the deep verandah, where clematis and the trumpet-vine clustered together round the light wooden pillars, and made tempting festoons of blossom for the humming-birds, which, like living jewels, poised and flew, and thrust their long slender beaks into the deep cups of the flowers, with an incessant, soft, bee-like murmur of delight. Violet, in her simple white gown, tied at the waist with a knot of ribbon, paused and shaded her eyes from the burning sunlight, while she looked right and left to see if Miss Letty were anywhere near. Yes!—there she was, sitting just inside the verandah in a low basket-chair, protected by a pretty striped awning, busy as usual with the embroidery at which she was such a skilled adept, her white fingers moving swiftly, and her whole attitude and expression one of the greatest simplicity and content.

"How peaceful she looks!" thought Violet, with a little nervous tremour—"I wonder if she will be vexed with me?"

Miss Letty at that moment raised her eyes to watch the dainty caperings of two of the humming-birds, whose exquisite blue wings glittered like large

animated sapphires, and in so doing saw Violet, and smiled. The girl approached quickly, and threw herself down beside her, taking her hat off, and lifting her bright hair from her forehead with a little sigh.

"Are you tired, my dear?" asked Miss Letty gently.

"Yes, I think I am. It is warm, isn't it? Oh dear, Miss Letty, you do look so sweet! Were you always as good as you are now?"

Miss Letty laid down her embroidery and smiled at this question.

"Good? My dear child, I'm not good! I am just as I always was—a woman—getting to be a very old one now—full of faults and failings. What makes you ask me such a funny question?"

"I don't know!" and Violet bit the ribbon of her hat spasmodically—"My own Miss Letty! Were you ever in love?"

The gentle lady started, and her delicate hands trembled, as she quietly took up her work and resumed her stitching.

"Yes, Violet," she answered softly—"And what you will say is more extraordinary, I am in love still!"

"He is dead?" queried Violet timidly.

"Yes. He is dead, so far as this world goes—but he is alive for me in Heaven. And I shall meet him—soon!"

She raised her patient sweet eyes for a moment—and their expression was so heavenly—the youth and beauty of the past was so earnestly reflected in their

clear depths, that Violet almost forgot it was an old face in which these orbs of constancy were set.

"Is that why you never married?" asked Violet, in hushed, tender tones.

"Yes, my dear. That is why. For I am an old-fashioned body—and I believe in the maxim, 'Once love, love always'!"

"Ah yes!"

Violet turned her head away and was silent for a long time. Miss Letty, still working, glanced at her now and then with a smile, till at last she said in sweet, equable tones,—

"Well! How long am I to wait for this little confession! Who is he?"

A face was turned upon her, rosy as the leaves of the trumpet-vine flowers above,—a pair of bright eyes flashed, like the twinkle of the humming-bird's wings, and a muffled voice exclaimed,—

"Miss Letty!"

In another moment the girl was at her feet, hiding her head in the folds of her old friend's gown, and making dreadful havoc with the silks and filoselles which were in use for the embroidery.

"Mind! There are needles about!" said Miss Letty, laughing a little—"They will scratch your pretty face—dear me!—you're catching all the silks in your hair!" and she carefully took out threads of blue and red and gold from the bright, rippling

curls of the bent head at her knee. "Now what's the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter," answered Violet, still hiding her eyes—though she got hold of Miss Letty's two hands and held them fast,—"It's only that last night—he said—he said——"

"That he loved you?" said Miss Letty tenderly, trying to help her out,—"Well, that's very natural on the part of any young man, I'm sure! But who is he?"

Violet perked her head up for a minute, and then burrowed it down again.

"Ah! That's just it!" she said, in smothered accents. "He is not exactly young."

"Oh, dear me! Is he old?"

"Oh *no*!" This answer was most emphatic—"But he isn't a boy, you know! He is—well—I suppose he is about thirty-five!"

"My dear child! But—before I pass any opinion, or give any advice—will you not just tell me plainly who he is? Does your uncle know him? Do I know him?"

"Everybody knows him!" said Violet. "That's the worst of it! That's why I'm afraid you won't like it! He is Mr. Max Nugent!"

Miss Letty almost jumped out of her chair. Max Nugent, the millionaire!—the man after whom all the "society" beauties of London, Paris, and New York had been running like hunters after a fox,—

he in love with little Violet? It seemed strange—almost unnatural—she could scarcely believe it, and in the extremity of her surprise, was quite speechless.

"He says he wishes he was not a millionaire!" said Violet in doleful accents, beginning to twist her hat round and round—"He says he wishes he was just a clerk in an office doing a grind, and coming home to me in a little weeny house! He would be quite content! But he can't help it! You see, his father left him all the dreadful money,—and the only thing he can use it for is to try to make other people happy. And he thinks I might help him to do that! But there,—I see by your looks you don't like it!"

A sudden rush of tears filled her eyes, and Miss Letty, recalling her scattered wits, made haste to put her arms round her and comfort her.

"My dear Violet, my darling girl, don't cry,—you quite mistake me. I am surprised,—indeed very much surprised—but I am not displeased. I know very little about Mr. Nugent,—I daresay he is a very good man—your uncle sees more of him than I do,—but—you must remember he is so much older than you are, and so much sought after by the world that it seems difficult to realize that he wants to marry my little girl! There—there! Don't cry! Does your uncle know?"

"I couldn't tell him!" sobbed Violet—"I wanted to, but I didn't dare! And Max said that it I told

you, he would tell uncle. Do you see? Then you two would meet and talk it over. There is nothing wrong with Max except his horrid money! Because everybody will say that I am a mean, designing, little wretch—and I really have not been anything of the kind—I never did anything to make him like me—only be just myself——"

Miss Letty kissed her.

"That is the secret of it, little one!" she said—"Being yourself—your dear self—is the only way to win a man's heart! And do you love him?"

Violet raised her eyes fully this time, and dashed away her tears.

"Yes, I do!" she said earnestly—"I love him dearly!"

Miss Letty stroked her hair thoughtfully.

"It will be a very responsible position for you, dear child, if you marry Mr. Nugent," she said seriously—"Very brilliant—very difficult—almost dangerous for such a young thing as you are! I think, Violet—that perhaps you would rather not have any advice from me just now?"

"Oh yes—yes! Do advise me! I want advice!" cried the girl enthusiastically. "Max said whatever you told me I was to do—as he honoured you more than any woman in the world—except me!"

Miss Letty laughed.

"I was going to say—surely he makes that one reservation!" she said. "Well, my dear, my advice

is that you refrain from entering into any sort of an engagement for at least a year. Your love for each other will hold out during that time of probation if it is worth anything—and then—you will be more certain of your own mind. Yes, I know"—for Violet was about to interrupt her,—"You think you are quite certain now, but you are not quite eighteen yet—a mere child—and Mr. Nugent is a man of the world—believe me, dear, it will be better for you, and better for him, to endure this test of faith. However, I am not the only one whose advice you must consider—there is your uncle Desmond. Now you know, Violet, he is one of the best and kindest men living, and he is very anxious to do everything well for his dear sister's child,—you will obey his wishes whatever they are, will you not?"

"Indeed, indeed I will!" said Violet earnestly,—"I promise!"

"That's my dear girl!" and Miss Letty kissed her again—"Now tell me all about this wonderful Max—though I know just how you feel about him."

"Do you?" said Violet, smiling and blushing—"Then *you* tell *me*!"

"You feel," said Miss Letty, taking her hands and pressing them tenderly, "that there never was, and never will be, such a splendid lover for a girl in the world as he is,—you feel that when he is near you' you are quite happy, and want nothing more than just to hear him speak, and watch his eyes resting

upon you,—you feel that there is a blank in your life when he is absent,—you feel that you would not worry him or vex him by so much as a thought—you feel that if God were to take him from you now—you would be very lonely—that you would perhaps never get over it all your life long."

Her voice trembled,—and Violet threw her arms impulsively about her.

"Dear, *dear* Miss Letty, you know!"

"Yes," said Miss Letty with a faint smile—"I know! Now, little one, let us try and talk quietly over this affair. Let me get to my work—you talk—and I listen."

And so as the drowsy heat of the afternoon cooled off towards sunset, when the humming-birds left off kissing the flowers and went to bed, like jewels put by in their velvety nest-cases, the two women sat together—the one young and brimful of hope and the dreams of innocence—the other old, but as fresh in heart and simplicity of faith as the girl who so joyously exulted in her springtime.

That evening Violet went off to a dance at the house of a neighbour, and Major Desmond dropped in to see Miss Letty, just as she was thinking it was about time to go to bed, notwithstanding the wonderful glory of the moon which looks so much more luminous and brilliant in the clear atmosphere of America than in the half misty but more tender pearl tint of the ever-changeful English skies. She stood on the low

step of her verandah, gazing wistfully up at the proudly glittering Diana, sweeping through heaven like the veritable huntress of the classic fable, without a cloud to soften the silver flashing of her bow—and as the Major's stalwart figure came slowly across the lawn, she was for a moment startled. He looked anxious and careworn ; and her heart sank a little. She was not actually surprised to see him ; he had his suite of rooms at an hotel not so very far away, and he was accustomed to stroll up to her house very often, bringing his friends with him. But a worried look on that cheery face was new to her, and she was not a little troubled to see it.

"Why, Dick!" she said, as he approached—"Isn't this rather a late visit?"

"Is it too late for you, Letty?" he asked gently—"If so, I'll go away again."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" she said cheerily,—"Violet has gone to a dance, and I meant to sit up for her in my room, but now we'll both sit up for her here. What a warm day it has been!—and it's a warm night too—I'll order you an iced sherry-cobbler."

She rang a bell which communicated with the house, and gave her order to the servant who answered it—then pushed a comfortable chair forward. The Major sank into it with a deep sigh.

"That's nice!" he said—"And I won't say no to the sherry-cobbler. I've had a wearying day."

"Have you? I am sorry!" and Miss Letty's eyes were full of sympathy—"Is it about—about Violet?"

"Yes—it's about Violet," said the Major, and then became silent, meditatively tinkling with a spoon the lumps of ice in the sherry-cobbler which had just been set before him.

"But I don't think you need worry about that," began Miss Letty.

He interrupted her by a slight gesture.

"Ah, you dear woman! You don't know! You are as sweetly ignorant of the ways of modern men as the ladies in the old-fashioned 'Book of Beauty,' who always wore their hair parted in the middle and went on smiling serenely at everything and everybody, even when their lives were ruined and their hearts broken. No, Letty! You don't know! Has Violet told you?"

"About Mr. Nugent—yes. I confess I was very much surprised."

"So was I—so I am still!" said the Major—"I don't know what to say about it. You see, Letty, it's this way. Max Nugent's father was the biggest rascal that ever died unhanged. He made his wealth by fraud—and thank goodness, he killed himself by over-eating! This young man, his only son, may be a very good fellow—but he has nothing to be proud of in his ancestry, and he has seen a great deal of the worst side of the world. He has lived his own life in Paris, Petersburg and Vienna, and I doubt—I doubt

whether he would make such a simple, unsophisticated little girl as Violet, happy. I told him so plainly. He came to me to-day, and talked very eloquently—and I must say very well. I explained to him that his wealth was simply monstrous and appalling,—positively vulgar, in fact. He said he knew it was, but he could not help it. Which of course he can't!"

Miss Letty laughed.

"Poor man! Are you not a little hard on him, Dick?"

The Major sipped his cobbler with a relish. His brows were clear,—the gentle presence of Miss Letty was already doing him good.

"I think not—I hope not!" he answered—"I told him just what I felt about it. I said that his money was a disgrace, because it had been gotten together by fraud. He admitted it. He offered to endow hospitals, free libraries, and build all sorts of benevolent institutions,—educate poor children, and encourage deserving beggars all round, if I let him marry Violet——"

"Well!"

"Well—I don't like it," said the Major very emphatically—"I tell you plainly, I don't like it! There's just a something about Nugent that I don't quite trust!"

Miss Letty looked grave.

"If you really feel like that, Dick——" she began.

"I do feel like it!" and the Major squared his

shoulders with a movement of resolution—"But I don't mean to make myself a slave to personal prejudice. And I have not refused Nugent—but I have said he must wait a year."

"That's exactly what I told Violet!" said Miss Letty triumphantly.

Desmond looked at her wistfully.

"There you are, you see! Everything proves as plainly as possible that we two ought to have been one, Letty! Our wits jump together by mutual consent. Well now, I have told this golden-crusted millionaire that I cannot permit any sort of engagement to exist between him and my young niece for twelve months. After that time is ended, if both he and she are of the same mind, I will consent to an engagement,—the marriage to follow in six months afterwards. He was very loth to agree to these terms—but finally, as I would hear of nothing else, he consented. And what does Violet say?"

"She is willing to do anything you wish," said Miss Letty.

"Yes—she is willing to do anything you wish!" echoed a soft voice behind them.

They both started and turned round. There stood Violet, just returned from her dance, looking the very perfection of sweet girlhood, in her simple white ball-dress, with a knot of carnations on her bodice, and a little wisp of tulle thrown over her head and shoulders. Her face was smiling, but her eyes were

soft and serious, and as soon as she saw she was perceived, she came forward and knelt down with a pretty grace at her uncle's feet.

"She is willing to do anything you wish!" she repeated—"Dearest uncle, you know I am!"

The old Major patted her head kindly.

"Yes, child!—I am sure you are! And so you have been playing the eavesdropper, eh? Now, who brought you home from the dance just now?"

"Max—Mr. Nugent did," answered Violet frankly—"But only just as far as the door. I asked him to come in and see Miss Letty, but he wouldn't!"

"Why wouldn't he?" asked the Major.

"Oh, I don't know!" and Violet gave a pretty gesture of deprecation—"I think he was shy!"

Desmond gave a short laugh.

"Shy! I never heard that of Max Nugent before! However,—love works wonders! Well now, Violet, Miss Leslie and I have been talking this matter over —and I'll tell you what we have decided. We are going to take you back to England for a year!"

Violet rose from her kneeling attitude at her uncle's side, and her face grew wistful.

"To England!"

"Yes—to England. Eh, Letty?" and he gave her a side wink. Miss Letty was startled, but she did not show it outwardly. She merely replied with a becoming meekness,—

"Whatever you think best for Violet, Dick."

"Well, I think that best," said Desmond firmly—"And to England we will go as soon as the summer is over; it's July now—we'll give you August and September to be happy in your own way, Violet, and to make Mr. Nugent distinctly understand that you have sufficient breadth and firmness of character to obey those who feel themselves responsible in a way for your future life and happiness,—and that you mean to make him deserve you by patience and fidelity. Do you understand?"

"Yes, uncle. I quite understand!" said Violet gently.

"And you are not unhappy about it?"

"No, uncle. You have been so good to me, and your love has been so true and kind, that I cannot doubt your knowing and doing for the best. I should indeed be an ungrateful little wretch if I thought otherwise. I shall obey you absolutely. And dear Miss Letty too!"

She stooped and kissed them both tenderly.

"Good night!" she said cheerily. "I have danced nearly all the evening—I'm tired, and I'm going to bed!"

"Good night, little one—God bless you!" said Miss Letty fondly.

"God bless you, darling Miss Letty!" And with another kiss and smile, Violet entered the house, paused on the threshold for a moment to wave her hand once more, and then vanished.

The two old people were silent for some minutes after she had gone. The glorious moon shed broad haloes of silvery light around them, and in the deep silence a whisper seemed to steal upon the heavily perfumed air, and creep into both their hearts, saying—"You two—you both were young once,—and now—do you not think you have wasted your lives for a dream's sake?"

But though they were conscious of this subtle suggestion, their brave souls had but the one response to it. Miss Letty certainly did not think her life was wasted because she had been faithful to the memory of her first love, and because since his death she had done what she could to make others, instead of herself, happy. And Dick Desmond, though he sometimes did feel a little bit sore about having had to sacrifice a sweet wife and cosy home, for the memory as he always said to himself "of a dead rascal,"—still he did not complain of the romantic faith that had kept his heart warm all these years, and enabled him to do good wherever he could in his own particular way. So that whisper of a half regret passed them by like the merest passing shadow,—and the Major rose up to go, squaring his shoulders in his usual fashion and shaking himself like a big retriever.

"I think I'm right, Letty!" he said with a meaning nod towards the direction in which Violet had disappeared.

"You are always right, Dick, I am sure!" responded Miss Letty sweetly.

The Major took up his broad Panama hat, and looked into its crown thoughtfully.

"You'll be ready to sail the first week in October, Letty?"

"Quite!"

"Good night!"

"Good night, Dick!"

Whereupon the Major put his Panama firmly on his head and walked slowly and meditatively down the garden and out of it—and Miss Letty put by the chairs on the verandah, and shut all the drawing-room windows. As she paused for a moment by her work-table to put one or two trifles by, her eyes rested for a moment on the pair of little worn shoes on the bracket above, and the pensive aspect of the toy cow "Dunny" that stood close by them, and that seemed to be steadfastly regarding their shabby toes with a contemplative sadness too deep for even a movable head to wag over.

"Poor Boy!" mused Miss Letty—"I wonder where he is—and what he is like—now!"

CHAPTER IX

THE summer flew by,—on wings of romance for Violet Morrison, but somewhat burdened with anxiety for Major Desmond and Miss Leslie. Max Nugent, millionaire and man of the world, was most charming in his manner to both the elderly people, and most tender and deferential in his devotion to the young girl in their charge,—but Major Desmond was not altogether satisfied about him. He wore a glass in his eye for one thing. People laughed at the Major when he made objection to such a trifle,—even Miss Letty laughed. But Desmond was obstinate.

"Well, will you tell me," he demanded, "the practical use of a glass in one eye? It can't assist the sight, for Nugent always reads without it. What's it for, then? To look at the scenery? That won't do, for the man always clicks it out of his eye whenever he glances at the landscape! There is only one reason for his wearing it—and that is to conceal his true expression!"

"Now look here, Desmond," said one of his club

friends—"You really are going too far. How the deuce can an eyeglass conceal expression?"

"I'll tell you how"—and the Major proceeded to demonstrate. "Suppose you succeed in training one eye to look straight while you told a crammer, and you can't train the other? Suppose that other eye insists on shifting about and blinking as the lie pops out of your mouth? Why then, clap the eyeglass on, and there you are!"

And though he was laughed at for this theory, he, to put it in his own way, "stuck to his guns."

And the middle of October saw Miss Letty back in England. October is often a very beautiful month in these "Happy Isles," and Miss Letty was not sorry to see the old country once again. Her house in Hans Place was still occupied by her tenants, whose lease did not expire till the coming Christmas; so she took a suite of rooms in one of the many luxuriously appointed hotels which nowadays make London such a habitable resort, and fixed this as her headquarters, while, in compliance with Major Desmond's ideas, she took Violet for various visits to some of the grand old country seats in England. For both she and Major Desmond had many friends among the best of the county folks who had beautiful homes, and loved those homes with a love which unfortunately is being relegated to the list of old-fashioned virtues, and Violet had plenty of chances to see for herself how English lives were lived, and what

English young men were like. But the girl was not attracted by any of the *jeunesse dorée* of her native country. Compared with the courtesy and attention she had received from the sterner sex in America, who are accustomed to treat women with the greatest honour and reverence, she found the English young man brusque, conceited, and often coarse in manner and conversation. And her love for the polished and deferential Max Nugent grew stronger and deeper, and all the graceful fancies, hopes and dreams of her young life clustered around him as the one inevitable centre of her existence. And the "eyeglass," to which her uncle attached such grave importance, never troubled her thoughts at all, except to move her to a smile when she thought of "uncle's fancy" regarding it. And Miss Letty watched her as a mother would have watched her, and noted all the little signs of this deep first love absorbing her life, with a tenderness and interest which were, however, not without a vague touch of foreboding.

Soon after their return to England, there came an excitement for Miss Letty herself, in the shape of a letter from Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir. Miss Letty had written to announce her return, but had scarcely expected any reply, though she had ventured to express the hope that "dear Boy" was quite well. Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir now wrote as follows, dating from a suburb of London :—

"MY DEAR LETITIA,

Your letter was quite a surprise to me, as I thought you had gone to America for good. I had a funny idea that you would perhaps get married there after all, for one hears of so many elderly women marrying nowadays, that there really seems a chance for everybody. Boy is at his military college preparing for Sandhurst, but as he will be up in London for an exam. next week I have told him to go and see you. I thought he had quite forgotten you, but he appears to remember you fairly well. Of course he was barely ten when you saw him last, and he is now sixteen, almost a young man as you will find. He is very tall, and *I* think good-looking, though that may be only a mother's fondness. Jim has been very ill lately;—a touch of what the doctors call hemiplegia, brought on of course by his own recklessness. I have to nurse him, and so you must excuse me if I do not make a formal call upon you. I have had to make many sacrifices in order to keep Boy at college, but a mother never grudges what she does for her son. Hoping you will be pleased to see Boy, and that you are as well as a woman of your age can expect to be,

Believe me, yours very sincerely,

AMELIA D'ARCY-MUIR.

P.S.—Boy will call and see you on Wednesday afternoon next, unless you write to say that the day is inconvenient."

With an inward delight which she felt was foolish, yet which she could not suppress, Miss Letty straightway wrote an answer to this, saying that she would be very pleased indeed to see Boy to luncheon on the Wednesday named; and having despatched this missive, she called Violet and told her of the expected visit of the child, now grown to a young stripling, whom she had loved so fondly. Violet listened with attentive sympathy.

"He was such a dear, pretty little fellow!" said Miss Letty affectionately. "He had such droll ways, and was altogether so quaint and lovable!"

"And how old is he now?" asked Violet.

"He is sixteen,—yes—of course he must be getting on for seventeen!" said Miss Letty almost wonderingly. "Dear me! How the time flies!"

"Just a year younger than I am!" said Violet.

"Yes. But you are quite a woman—thinking of getting married too! Well, well!"—and Miss Letty heaved a little sigh of resignation. "However, young women grow older much more quickly than young men, and I daresay Boy is quite a boy still!"

"I hope he is,—for your sake, my own Miss Letty!" said Violet tenderly—"I shouldn't like you to be disappointed in him!"

Miss Letty looked thoughtful.

"Of course he will be changed," she said—"very much changed! He was changed even when he came to stay with me in Scotland, and he was not quite ten

then. He seemed to me much sadder and older than a child of his years ought to have been. But he has had a long time of study at a very excellent military college somewhere down in the country, and I daresay that the training there has made quite a man of him. Poor Boy! Margaret will tell you all about him if you ask her."

And Violet did ask Margaret, who now, grown extremely stout and jolly, had come over from her home in Scotland to serve her beloved Miss Letty once more. The trip to America had been too much for the worthy woman's contemplation, and when her mistress had gone there, she and the respectable butler Plimpton had made a match of it, and were now the proprietors of a small but extremely cosy hotel on the picturesque shores of Loch Etive. But as soon as she heard that Miss Letty had returned to England for a time, nothing would serve but that she must come to London and attend upon her again,—an idea which entirely met with her husband's approval. And so here she was, established in the hotel in a room adjoining Miss Letty's, wearing a smart white apron, and sewing away as if she had never left her situation at all, and as if the six years of her married life that had intervened were nothing but a dream.

"Do I remember Master Boy?" she said now, as Violet asked her the question,—"I should think I do indeed! Just the bonniest wee lad! And Miss

Letty was sair fashed about him,—and she would have given her best of all in the world to have got him wi' her, and adopted him as her own. Ah, she's a grand leddy! What a wife and mither she would ha' made to any man gude enough for her!"

"And she loved Boy very much then?" went on Violet, playing abstractedly with a gold chain she always wore, on which Max Nugent had hung a heart of fine rubies and diamonds.

"Ay, that she did!" said Margaret, stitching away at the frill of one of her "leddy's" silken gowns. "And she loves him still just as much, I'll be bound. You mark my words, Miss Violet,—I'm pretty sure the dear woman hasna done wi' Master Boy!" and she nodded her head and pursed up her lips mysteriously.

"You think he will want Miss Letty to help him on in his career perhaps?" said Violet.

"I couldna tell—I canna say!" replied Margaret. "But if ever a lad had feckless parents, it's this same lad—and if ever a bairnie had a bad start to begin life upon, it's this same bairnie! You tell me what you think of him, Miss Violet, after ye've had a bit look at him?"

"Oh, if he knows you are here, he'll want to see you himself, surely!" said the girl.

Margaret looked up with a shrewd smile in her kind eyes.

"Don't ye be thinking of that, Miss Violet," she

said. "There is naebody like myself for kennin' how soon we're forgotten by the folks we have loved. I mind me when I used to put Master Boy to bed, he would throw his wee arms round me and say, 'I'll never forget ye, Margit,' and it just pleased me for a while to believe it. But when I married Plimpton, I sent the laddie a bit o' wedding cake marked 'from Margit,' and never a word did I hear o' the lad or the cake at all. And I was a fule to expect it; for ye see, when he was in Scotland wi' us, we had a bit few of his old toys, and with them there was one he used to be amazing fond of——"

"I know!" said Violet quickly—"The Cow!"

Margaret laughed.

"Yes—just the Cow!" she said—"The wee wise-looking thing you see ever on a shelf somewhere near Miss Letty, with the old shoes Master Boy left behind him when he first stayed with her. Well, when he came to Scotland, he didna care for the puir beastie any more,—and that's just how it is wi' me,—he's just as indifferent to me as he is to the toy he put away in his babyhood. That's where all we women have to suffer, Miss Violet,—when the bairnies we ha' loved and tended grow up to be men and women, they never give us more thought than the playthings they have done with!"

Violet heard, and went away, thinking gravely of many things. She was growing a little more serious and wistful in her manner; the difficulties and dis-

appointments of life were beginning to suggest themselves to her young spirit, although vaguely as yet and dimly. She had nothing to complain of at present in her own fortunes—except—except that Max Nugent's letters were all very brief and scrappy. She would have liked longer and more ardent epistles from her declared lover,—and she scolded herself for this wish, which she said was selfish, because of course, with all his great responsibilities of wealth, he must have a great deal to do. But despite her struggle with herself, the little shadow ot disappointment hung like a faint cloud in her sky, and made her particularly sensitive to the possible griefs of others.

"It must be so hard to be disappointed in persons you love!" she thought. "To find that they are not the good or noble beings you imagined them—it must be so hard! I do hope Miss Letty will find Boy all that she expects him to be—and more!"

The anxiously expected Wednesday came at last. and Miss Letty ordered a charming little luncheon in her private sitting-room, and decorated the table herself with the loveliest flowers to welcome Boy. Violet, with instinctive tact, arranged to go out that morning with her uncle, and not to return till it was quite the luncheon-hour, in order that Miss Letty might have the first meeting with her young friend alone. The dear lady was in a great flutter; she was for once quite fastidious about her appearance, and

put on her newest gown, a soft, silver-grey silk, trimmed with an abundance of fine old Irish point lace. And when she was dressed, it was no exaggeration on the part of the faithful Margaret to say she looked "quite beautiful"! With her sweet, good face, and soft hair, now snow-white, raised from her clear, open brow, and that indefinable grace of perfect breeding which always distinguished her, Miss Letty looked much fairer than many a young woman in the pride of her earliest days. And when, as the hour grew nearer for Boy's arrival, a little pink flush coloured the pale transparency of her cheeks, she had such a charm about her as would certainly have made fresh havoc in the good Major's warm heart, had he seen her just at that moment. There was an elaborate Parisian clock in the sitting-room, the pendulum of which was an unpleasant-featured gilt nymph in a swing, and Miss Letty looked anxiously at the ugly and inflexible young lady as she jerked the minutes away with a seemingly infinite tedium. At last the hotel waiter appeared with the brief announcement,—

"A young gentleman to see you, mum!"

Miss Letty advanced trembling, as a slim lad, getting on for six feet in height, stumbled over the door-mat and entered awkwardly.

"Boy! I am so glad to see you again!"

The stripling giggled nervously.

"Yes—er,—how d'you do?" he stammered; and

he sought anxiously about for a place to put his bowler hat, and finally set it carefully down on an empty flower-pot and began to stare doubtfully at the ceiling. But Miss Letty was not disheartened by these signs of indifference.

"What a big fellow you are!" she said tenderly, looking at him with eyes that were almost tearful. "I really don't think I should have known you if I had met you in the streets by chance!"

Boy giggled again.

"N—o! I don't suppose you would!" he said. "Mother said you wouldn't!"

"Have you just come from your college?" asked Miss Letty, her heart beginning to sink a little as she noticed that his eyes wandered completely away from her, and considered the wall-paper more attentively than herself.

"Yes. Some fellows came up for the exam. with me. Two are going for the medical. I've done that!"

"Oh! And have you passed?"

"Oh yes! I'm all right!"

Boy smiled foolishly, scratched his chin, and sitting down on a high chair measured the toes of his boots carefully together.

"What exam. are you going up for now?" asked Miss Letty, sitting down also, and realising with a sudden pang that he was not in the least moved to any affectionate outburst by seeing her.

"Oh, just the first one for Sandhurst. I don't expect I shall pass it."

"Why not?"

"Oh, it's pretty stiffish. I don't care much if I don't pass. There'll be another."

Good Miss Letty was not very deeply instructed on the subject of exams., so she changed the subject.

"I've been a long time away in America, you know," she said. "I have only just come back."

"Yes. So I heard."

Miss Letty looked steadfastly at him. He was a good-looking lad, thin but well made, and delicately featured,—but his eyes were shifty and avoided hers.

"Do you remember me at all, Boy?" she asked very tenderly.

Boy coloured and hesitated.

"I—I think I do," he said. "I stayed with you in Scotland."

"Yes. And you used to play with a little boy named Alister McDonald,—do you ever think of him?"

Boy looked puzzled for a moment.

"Oh, yes! I know! A little round-faced chap!"

Miss Letty went on patiently,—

"Do you remember Major Desmond?"

"Yes—a little."

Miss Letty took up her sewing. She required that useful embroidery to steady her trembling fingers.

"I asked you when we were in Scotland to write to me sometimes," she said gently. "And you said you would. Why didn't you?"

"I did!" burst out Boy suddenly, getting very red, and remembering the old injury which had rankled far more deeply in his soul all these years than any remembrance of affection. "And you never answered!"

Miss Letty laid down her work with a look of surprise and indignation darkening her gentle eyes.

"You wrote and I never answered!" she repeated. "My dear Boy, there must be some mistake! I have never heard a word from you since you said good-bye to me in Scotland!"

Boys cheeks paled as suddenly as they had reddened, and he took to the re-measuring of his boot toes.

"Mother didn't send the letter!" he said slowly,—"that's how it was. It was not my fault. I wrote to you before I went to school in France!"

Silence fell between them. Miss Letty had much ado to keep back the outward expression of her wounded feeling,—and, as she looked at the lad and began to notice the air of listless indifference which surrounded him like a natural atmosphere exhaled from his own personality, she was conscious of a great bitterness and resentment in her own mind. After a little, however, she managed to control herself, and said gently,—

"Can you recollect what it was you wrote to me about?"

"Oh yes,"—Boy answered readily,—"I wrote to tell you that I was being sent to a school in France, and asked you to try if you could help me not to go. I was a little chap and did not like it." He paused a moment and reddened at the recollection,—then smiled sheepishly. "But it did not matter!"

Miss Letty thought it did matter,—but she said nothing.

"I went to France," continued Boy. "It was all right!"

"Did you like the school there?"

"Oh, it was fairly decent!" he answered briefly.

At that moment a diversion was created by the entrance of Major Desmond and his niece. Miss Letty looked a little wearied and wistful as she said,—

"Violet, this is Boy. Boy, this is Major Desmond's niece who has been with me in America, Miss Violet Morrison."

Boy jerked himself up out of his chair, glanced at the young lady shyly, and smiled vaguely.

"Won't you shake hands?" said Violet kindly.

Boy went through this act of courtesy with a curiously limp ungraciousness, the Major staring at him the while.

"He has grown very tall, hasn't he?" said Miss Letty, with a little sigh, as she rang the bell for luncheon to be served.

"Tall! I should think so!" replied the Major. "He's grown out of all knowledge. Well, sir, how are you?"

"Very well, thank you!" answered Boy, without raising his eyes from their study of the carpet.

"I suppose you don't remember me at all," pursued the Major—"do you?"

"Y—yes! You took me to Scotland to see Miss Letty."

As he uttered her name thus—"Miss Letty,"—a sudden sparkle came into his eyes, and he looked at her with more interest than he had yet shown. Some little brain-cell was stirred which awakened old past associations, and a number of half-forgotten memories began to run through his mind like the notes which form the cadence of a song. "It was always like this," he considered—"beautiful rooms and beautiful flowers,—and she—she always wore beautiful silks and lace like to-day,—but then, as mother says, she's got any amount of money."

Just then, the waiter entered with the luncheon, and they all sat down to table, Violet glancing at Boy from time to time under the shadow of her long eyelashes, not knowing quite what to make of him.

"Well, what are you doing with yourself now?" asked the Major. "Going up for Sandhurst?"

"Yes."

"Are you glad you are going to be a soldier?"

Boy was engaged in fastidiously picking one or two bones out of the small piece of fish which had just been served to him, and he replied abstractedly,—

"Oh, I don't mind it!"

"Don't mind it!" exclaimed Desmond. "But—God bless my soul!—don't you *like* it? Don't you *love* it? Don't you think it's the finest thing a young chap can do,—to learn how to fight for the glory of his country?"

Boy looked quite surprised at this outburst. Then it seemed to dawn upon him in the light of a joke, for he sniggered.

"Oh, not so much as all that!" he said, and fell to carefully considering the fish-bones again.

The Major gave a portentous cough, and swallowed his portion of fish recklessly, somewhat as if he were swallowing a big "D——n!" by way of sauce and flavour to the whole. Violet flushed and paled alternately,—she was feeling worried on behalf of Miss Letty, who looked nervous and preoccupied.

"Would you have preferred some other profession?" she asked gently, venturing to join in the conversation.

"I never thought about it," said Boy, eating his fish now that it was picked and prepared to his particular liking. "When I came back from France, father sent me just where he chose——and—that's how it is."

"Then you don't really care about it, perhaps?" queried Miss Letty, determined to get something

out of him somehow concerning his tastes or aversions. "You don't really *love* the work of preparing for the Army?"

"Oh, I don't think any of the fellows care much about the *work*," said Boy carelessly—"you couldn't expect them to *love* work! You see they do just what their fathers and mothers want them to do. Some chaps have a choice, I believe—but I don't know any. It's no good saying you want to be one thing when your father wants you to be something else."

Major Desmond listened attentively, and his eyes, twinkling with anger a moment before, softened a little.

"What did you want to be?—if ever you *did* want to be anything?" he asked.

Boy hesitated and shuffled his feet under the table. Miss Letty looked at him anxiously,—so did Violet. Catching Miss Letty's loving glance, he took courage.

"When I was quite a small chap like,—" he explained stammeringly, "I used to think I would be an explorer. I wanted to travel a long long way off to strange countries, and find things nobody had ever found."

He checked himself abruptly. The waiter was handing round new dishes to tempt the appetite, and Boy had to choose between 'vol-au-vent,' and 'cotelettes d'agneau, points d'asperges.'

"Well," said the Major—"that wasn't a bad idea.

There's nothing to prevent your doing that still. A soldier can be an explorer as well."

"Yes, but I think that all gets knocked out of you at college," said Boy, beginning to gain more confidence as he talked. "You see, you can't be an explorer very well, unless you can get some Government to commission you to explore, and find you all the money and the rig-out. And when you're an officer in the Army, you've got to obey orders, and go where you're told,—not where you like."

This statement was unanswerable, and for a few minutes the little party of four at luncheon ate 'vol-au-vent' and 'cotelettes d'agneau,' without much recognition of the delicacies they were supposed to be enjoying. Miss Letty had certainly lost her appetite. But—as was her usual habit—she mentally scolded herself for allowing any sense of hurt or disappointment to weigh upon her mind. "What am I bothering my head about!" she thought: "the boy is going through the usual training necessary for his career, and is being turned out just like other boys." But there, though she did not admit it to herself, was the chief source of her regret,—"just like other boys!" That was the pity and pain of it. Ground down into the same educational pattern,—crammed with the same assorted and classified facts,—trained by the same martinet rules of discipline, without any thought taken as to diversity of character or varying quality of temperament, Boy was being shaped, like a jelly

in a cook's mould, to the required size and type of the military automaton. There would be no room left for the expansion of any new or bold form of disposition,—no chance would be given for any originality of ideas,—he was destined to become merely one of a set of army chess-men, moving in strict accordance with the rules of the game,—rules, not only of the game of war, but of the game of life. And part of this game of life, with latter-day Englishmen, is to check all natural emotion,—kill enthusiasm, —and let all the wonders of the world and the events of time and history pass by, while you stand in the place where fortune or circumstance has thrown you, never budging, and indifferent to all things but your own precious, and (if you only knew it!) most unimportant and ridiculously opinionated self. It was the knowledge of this system of education that gave Miss Letty the uncomfortable little ache at her heart, as she noted Boy's evident listlessness and cynicism; for in the sweet, eminently idealistic, but unpractical way of women, she had hoped something better and higher might have chanced for him. She watched him as he ate his 'vol-au-vent,'—which, after a slow consideration, causing much irritation to the vivacious French waiter who served it to him, he had chosen as the most tempting of the two 'entrées' offered,— and wondered what would be his ultimate fate! In prospective fancy she saw him as an officer on half-pay, like his father,—perhaps married to a slovenly

woman, like his mother,—and—who could tell?—finally taking to the same dissolute courses which marked the daily existence of the Honourable Jim! And while she was thinking this with a little inward shudder, Violet was endeavouring to 'draw him out' on some other subject than the way in which he considered his career,—a way which she could see was distinctly vexatious to both her uncle and Miss Letty. Drawing towards her one of the graceful clusters of flowers which so lavishly decorated the table, she said,—

"How lovely the English roses are!—much sweeter than the American! Are you fond of flowers?"

This, with a bright glance at Boy.

"I don't mind them much!" he replied indifferently.

Violet coloured a little, and was silent. Her attempt to turn the conversation into a lighter and more pleasant vein, was frustrated.

But now the Major spoke.

"You don't 'mind' flowers?" he said. "Well, what *do* you mind? Anything?"

Boy laughed.

"I don't know."

"I wish you did know!" said the Major with impressive mock-solemnity—"I should like to ascertain from you just exactly the worth of things. I am sure you could tell me!"

Boy took this quite seriously.

"How?" he enquired.

"Well, in this way. You are learning more at your college than I learned in all my life. When I was a young chap drilling for the Army, I didn't know anything except the rough-and tumble glory of it. I had no one to 'cram' me,—I passed no 'exams.' It's all altered, you see. A young subaltern knows nearly as much (on paper) as his commanding officer nowadays. That's why I want you to tell me things."

"Don't, Dick!" remonstrated Miss Letty with a faint smile.

"'Don't—what?—Don't try to learn any more than I know at my age? All right!—if you ask me I won't!" And the old gentleman gave one of his hearty jolly laughs. "Now, for goodness' sake, Boy, eat some pudding!"

"I don't care for pudding, thanks!" said Boy, allowing the suggested dainty to pass him. "I never eat sweets."

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated the Major. "Here, waiter!—pudding for me, please!—I'm a boy! A boy!—by Jove!—I'm a child!—this young gentleman has so far outgrown me, that I'm a positive baby!"

Boy looked vaguely surprised at the Major's hilarity over this trifle, but he was not personally moved by it, nor did he accept it as a good-humoured satire on himself. He smiled, and sat, civilly serene, crumbling a bit of bread on the table; and when the luncheon was finished, every one,—even Miss Letty—

seemed glad that an exceptionally embarrassing meal had come at last to an end.

After it, however, there was nothing more to be done. Any display of affection towards Boy was rendered, by the impassibility of the lad himself, out of place. Miss Letty felt that she could not have kissed him for all the world as she used to do, and Violet saw that it would be a hopeless business to try and remind him of his old friend Margaret, who had tended him with such devoted care in bygone days. The Major, in his strong interest and affection for Miss Letty, did his best to enliven the dull atmosphere, and to coax Boy to express himself with freedom and fearlessness and candour,—but it was no use. There was a piano in the room, and Violet, who had a very sweet and beautifully trained voice, gave them a pretty old 'plantation' song, eliciting from Boy the remark that he 'had not heard *that* one before.' Asked as to the health of his father and mother, he said they were both 'all right.'

"I thought your father was ill?" said Miss Letty.

"Oh yes, if you mean *that* kind of illness. He can't move one of his legs,—but he's been like that a good while."

Pressed for his opinion on what he would like best in the world, he answered, with more brightness than he had yet displayed,—

"Plenty of money."

"Why?" asked the Major.

"Well, you can do anything with it, you see. There's a fellow in our college, for instance—he's an awfully low chap—and if his father hadn't got what they call a 'boom' in some stock or other, he couldn't have got in, for it's supposed to be a college of gentlemen's sons only, and his father kept a fish-stall, so they say. And he's going in for the Army now. You can do everything with money."

"You can't buy friends with it," said the Major.

"Can't you? I thought you always could!" And Boy smiled, the smile of the superior cynic who knows he has uttered an unpleasant truth.

The Major was taken aback for a moment. But he returned to the charge.

"You can buy social friends, no doubt," he said,—"but not true ones."

"I shouldn't care for *very* true friends," said Boy calmly. "They would be sure to interfere with whatever you wanted to do."

No one vouchsafed a comment on this remark, and Boy went on,—

"Mother says friends are always prying about and bothering you. If you get too much of them like, they are an awful nuisance."

Still no observation was volunteered by either of the elderly people, or the one young girl, who sat listening to these cutting statements from a lad of sixteen.

"If I had a lot of money—heaps and heaps of

money"—continued Boy—"I could do just as I liked. I could leave the Army—go travelling—or do nothing but just amuse myself, which of course would be best of all."

"You think so?" said the Major. "Well, you would find it a pretty hard task to amuse yourself, if you had no fixed occupation and no friends. You'd go to the devil, as they say, in double-quick time, without so much as a halt by the way."

Boy laughed, but looked incredulous.

"Work," pursued the Major sententiously, "is the greatest blessing in the world. If a man has no work to do, he should find some."

"I don't see how that is," said Boy. "People only work in order to have no need to work."

Miss Letty suddenly rose from her chair. She was looking tired and pale.

"I think," she said gently, "I will say goodbye to you now, Boy. I am going out for a drive,—and you—you have to go for your exam., haven't you?"

"Yes,"—and Boy glanced furtively at the clock,—"I've got to be there by three."

"Well, it's time you were off, then," said the Major, somewhat gruffly. "I'll walk with you part of the way."

Boy scrambled about for a minute or two in search of his hat,—found it, and stuck it on his head.

"Good-bye!" he said, nodding at Miss Letty.

"Take your hat off, sir!" said the Major, bluntly.

Boy looked exceedingly foolish, and blushed deeply as he removed the offending 'bowler.' Miss Letty felt sorry for him, and came up in her own gracious, gentle manner to pat his shoulder, and to press a little knitted silk purse into his hand. She had made the purse, dear soul, herself, with loving thoughts as well as loving fingers.

"Good-bye, Boy!" she said, rather sadly. "This is just a little present—you can buy what you like with it. I hope you will pass your exam. If you have time will you let me know?"

"Oh yes," said Boy, taking the purse, and cramming it into his pocket without a look, or a smile, or a 'thank you,'—"as soon as I know myself. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Violet, without offering her hand this time.

"Good-bye!"

The Major clapped on his hat.

"Come along!" he said brusquely.

Boy looked round,—at the ceiling, at the walls, and finally at Miss Letty.

"Good-bye!" he said again.

"Good-bye, dear Boy!"

The door opened—closed,—he was gone,—following the Major, who, in somewhat irritated haste, led the way.

When the echo of their footsteps had passed through the outer passage and sunk into silence, Miss

Letty sat quietly down in her arm-chair again. Half mechanically she fingered the old Irish point lace at her neck, and looked at the soft silken folds of her 'best' gown that swept the floor. After all, she need not have been so particular about her dress! Boy had not noticed her appearance with any visible amount of affectionate liking or observation!

Still slowly and musingly she played with her delicate lace and sighed almost unconsciously, till Violet, after sympathetically watching her for a few minutes, could bear it no longer.

"My own Miss Letty!" she said fondly, going up to her chair and kneeling down beside it,—"you are tired?"

"A little, my dear!"

"And—and disappointed?" murmured Violet timidly.

Miss Letty paused before replying. Then she took the girl's hand in her own and patted it tremblingly.

"Well—I won't be a humbug about it, child!" she said with a faint smile—"I *am* disappointed. Yes. I don't know why I should be, but I am."

"He is a very nice-looking boy," said Violet soothingly. "It is only his manner that seems so curt and ungracious. But all English boys are like that, I think, and he is at an awkward age."

Miss Letty shook her head.

"Yes—that may be," she said. "But it is not his manner, Violet,—it is his heart! That is what frets

me. It is the sweet little heart of the child I loved so much!—that heart is gone, Violet! Quite gone! —there is something withered and hard in its place that is not a heart at all—the heart has gone!"

Violet was silent.

"The heart has been killed in him," went on Miss Letty regretfully—"it has been crushed out of him. There is no warmth—no brightness of feeling in that starved little soul! He is not to blame. It is the fault of his bringing-up. I am very sorry for him—very! Poor Boy!"

She sat quiet for a few minutes, trying to control the little nervous trembling which, like a cold ague, now and then shook her thin and delicate frame,—then she said suddenly,—

"Violet, do you know I feel very strangely about Boy!"

"Do you, my own Miss Letty?"—and Violet slipped an affectionate arm about her—"What do you feel?"

"Well,—you will think me a very foolish old woman perhaps, my dear—but I feel that Boy—the Boy I loved—is not here any more. He is not dead, but he has gone!—gone in some way that I cannot explain,—but I shall meet him in Heaven! Yes!" and Miss Letty smiled—"I shall find him again,—I shall find the little fair soul of the child that used to call me 'Kiss Letty'—the soul that is no longer here,—but—*there*!"

She raised her soft blue eyes, radiant with love and trust; and Violet looked at her with the worship of a devotee for a shrined saint. Miss Letty, presently meeting this upturned adoring gaze, bent down and kissed her very tenderly.

"And so, dear girl," she continued, "we will say no more of Boy just now. Boy is put away among an old woman's sentimental memories. The last illusion of a life, my dear!—the last illusion of a life! Let it go,—back to God, where it came from! Because He will restore to us all our lost beautiful things, and teach us why they were taken from us for a little while—only for a little while. . . ."

She pressed Violet's hand,—then, with a slight effort, rose from her chair, and smiled cheerfully.

"Put your things on, little one!" she said—"we will go for a drive. And we will think of nothing except just how to make ourselves pleasant and kind to every one for the passing hour,—for that is as much a duty as anything else in this world. Run away!—dress quickly!"

Violet kissed her, and ran off.

When she was gone, Miss Letty stood gazing into vacancy, with a strangely wearied expression. A grey shadow, like a hint of death, clouded her sweet old face for the first time.

"Good-bye, Boy!" she whispered softly to the silence. . . . "Good-bye, dear little Boy! God bless you!"

CHAPTER X

One of the greatest among our most English of English poets has finely expressed the melancholy transformation which one brief day may make in human destinies, thus :—

> One day! one night! yet what a change they bring!
> High in the clouds the same sweet birds may sing,
> The same green leaves may rustle in the air,
> And the same flowers unfold their blossoms fair,—
> Still Nature smile, unchanged in all her plan,
> But, oh, what change may blight the soul of man!
> The sun may rise as brightly as before,
> But many a heart can hail its beams no more;
> 'Tis but one turn of earth's incessant ball,
> Yet in that space what myriad hopes may fall!
> What love depart! what friendship melt away!
> Ay, Virtue's self may wane to her decay,
> Torn from her throne, heart-placed, in one eventful day!

And if this be true—as it is,—none of us should be surprised at the changes wrought in six years. Yet Major Desmond was so far removed from the philosophy of indifferentism as to be more than surprised at the complete metamorphosis of "young D'Arcy-Muir," as he now called him in his own mind, instead of the old, familiar and endearing name of "Boy."

In half an hour's walk with him through the London streets the Major, who had seen all sorts and conditions of men young and old,—lads beginning their career, and veterans on the verge of finishing it, gauged his disposition and temperament pretty correctly. Two characteristics were particularly marked in him which did not augur well for his future. One was a slighting contempt for women,—the result, of course, of contact with his mother's shiftless, slovenly, useless mode of life. Her inability to awaken either admiration or respect in her son's mind, was a seed of mischief which was beginning to bear abundant harvest. The other dominating point was a spirit of weariness, listless boredom and cynicism, which might be real or might be affected,—but which, whether it were one or the other, was indescribably irritating to a man of the Major's frank and vigorous type. "Nil admirari" was not his Gospel. His particular habit of life was to consider all things with gratitude and appreciation,—to be thankful for the simple privilege of being alive, and having eyes wherewith to see the many varying wonders and beauties of the world which Providence had ordained to him as his home. But it may be remarked, in passing, that this is unfortunately not the 'habit' which is generally encouraged by the latter-day masters of schools and colleges among their boys. They make much of the difficulties of life,—but little of its pleasures. The hardships of

learning are insisted upon, but not the delights. The little dry pedagogues who undertake the high and responsible business of fostering the growth and guiding the education of young unspoilt natures, do their best as a rule to cramp and destroy all that is fresh and eager and enthusiastic. A young colt gallops about in the meadows, and frisks and rolls on the soft green turf, rejoicing in his youth and strength,—but the young boy must take his college 'sports' as he takes his lessons,—by rule and line and with more or less severity, under the control of a master. Absolute freedom of body and soul,—or what may be called pure revelry in the mere fact of life, is almost unknown to the 'crammed' modern lad,—he is old before his time,—and it is no uncommon thing to see a stripling of fourteen or fifteen quite wrinkled in face, with that dull film in his eyes which used to be the special and distinctive sign of extreme old age. It is a sad pity!—for youth is a gracious thing and life is full of beauty, and the natural joy, the opulent vivacity and radiating force of a truly young heart, are the most cheerful of all physical influences. One of the pagan philosophers asserts that "if a country is peopled with joyous inhabitants, that is, those who take pleasure in innocent and healthful pastimes, in which young men and maids take equal part, such as country games, village feasts and dances, it is a safe and good country to live in, and you may be sure that the people thereof

are more virtuous than vicious, more wise than foolish,—but if things are in such a condition that the youth of both sexes are constrained to dulness, and have no mirth set forth for them, such as meadow festivals of flowers, and harmless tripping forth together to the sound of music, then beware, for it is a country full of languors and vapourish discontents, where there will be seditions and troubles, if not sooner, then late, and men will agitate with those who labour, for excess of payment rather than excess of toil, while honesty and open dealing will be more known by memory than present fact."

And if, in pagan times, they could so consider the merit and national advantage of the spirit of joy, how much more ought we, in our Christian generation, to feel that we cannot do too much to inculcate that happy spirit among the young,—we who have almost 'touched' immortality in the divine teaching of Christ,—we, who know there is no death but only a 'passing on' from joy to joy!

Major Desmond was one of those few remaining 'grand old men' who, without any cant or feigned excess of piety, believed humbly and devoutly in the holiness and saving grace of the Christian faith. Both as a man and a soldier,—safe at home, or face to face with death on the battlefield, he had guided his conduct as best he could by its plain principles, and it had, as he himself expressed it, 'carried him through.' But it lay too close to his heart for him

to willingly make it a subject of conversation,—yet, while he talked with Boy, or rather while he elicited certain scrappy monosyllables from him in reply to his own easy chat, he became gradually aware that the lad was a complete atheist,—that he had no idea whatever of God, and no sense of the proportion and balance existing between the material and spiritual side of things. The deep, hard cynicism which showed itself more and more as the foundation of his character made him casual and flippant even in his 'Yes' or 'No'; and by-and-by, after trying him on various themes,—his home, his studies, his 'sports,' his interests generally—Desmond instinctively realised that this young and embittered scrap of humanity was sitting in cold judgment on himself, and relegating him to the level of a garrulous old man who did not know what he was talking about. For irreverence to age is one of the unadmirable features of a large proportion of the rising 'new' generation. As soon as this idea was borne in upon his mind, the Major came to a sudden halt.

"Well, you're nearly where you want to be, aren't you?" he demanded.

Boy looked about him. They were at the corner of Trafalgar Square.

"Yes. It's just down Northumberland Avenue."

"All right!" and Desmond glanced at his watch—"Five minutes to three! You'd better look sharp! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Boy carelessly, without raising his cap, and in another moment he had gone.

Major Desmond paused a moment, staring after him. Then he shook his head. Then he took out his cigar-case, chose a cigar, and lit it. Then he walked slowly and thoughtfully to his club, where he found his old friend 'Fitz,' "of the rueful countenance," in a favourite arm-chair near the window reading the paper.

"Hullo!" said that gentleman.

"Hullo!" responded the Major dismally.

"Where have you been?" inquired 'Fitz'—"You look as if you were down on your luck!"

"Do I?" and Major Desmond threw himself into the opposite chair. "It is not that. I've had a depressing companion."

"Oh!" said Fitz. "Where did you pick him up? Who was he?"

"Boy," said the Major, with a sort of grunt that was half a groan—"at least, not Boy, but the young chap that used to be Boy."

Fitz raised his melancholy blue eyes with a bewildered expression.

"Do you mean the little fellow Miss Leslie was so fond of?"

"Yes. It's a blow to her, Fitz!—I'm sure it *must* be a blow!"

Fitz was puzzled, and grew more saturnine of aspect than ever.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "What's happened? Has he got anything the matter with him?"

"He's got everything the matter with him!" said the Major, bursting forth into hot speech—"everything! Callousness is the matter with him—worldliness is the matter with him—indifference to affection is the matter with him,—d——n it, sir!—general priggishness is the matter with him! By Jove! The rascal doesn't seem to have an ounce of real warm blood in all his body!"

The thin stern physiognomy of the worthy Captain 'Fitz' remained unmoved, except for the faintest flickering expression, which might have been satire, grief, surprise, scorn, or humour, whichever way the observer chose to take it.

"Ah!" he said, letting the ejaculation escape his lips slowly, as though it were a puff of smoke.

The Major rolled his eyes indignantly.

"Ah!" he repeated—"Is that all you can say?"

"My dear chap, what do you want me to say?" remonstrated Fitz—"There's nothing to be said!"

"That's true!" said the Major, and relapsed into silence. But not for long, however. Drawing his cigar out of his mouth after an interval of meditative smoking, he began in subdued tones,—

"When I think of her, Fitz—you know who I mean—Letty,—when I think of her sweetness and patience and goodness, and when I remember all the

pretty tender ways she had with that little fellow!—and when—after all these years, he came to visit her to-day, and I saw her looking wistfully at him to see if he had the smallest pulse of affection beating in his hard young heart for her, I could have cried! Yes, I could! I'm an old fool of course,—you can call me one if you like and have done with it. But that's how I felt. Of course years have gone by,—he was a child when she saw him last—but I should have thought—yes, I should certainly have thought, that if he had any recollections of his childhood at all, he would at least have remembered her—and how she loved him!"

Whereupon Fitz roused himself to utterance.

"There's where you were wrong, Dick"—he said. "You have made the same fatal mistake we all make when we think that love—love of any kind—will last!"

The Major looked at him steadfastly, but did not interrupt him.

"It's the same thing everywhere. Men and women fall in love,—swear eternal fidelity—and by-and-by we find them figuring in the divorce court. Other men and women resign themselves gracefully to the monotony of each other's companionship for life, and God sends them children to cheer up the dullness a little, and they think those children are perfect paragons, who will grow up to love them in their old age. Not a bit of it! Not nowadays. Old folks are voted a bore,—and the young cub

of the present day may often be heard declaring that the 'Governor' has had 'too long an innings,' and 'doesn't know when to die.' As for Boy,—Miss Letty's pet Boy,—from all you tell me, he has gone; there's only a young cub left now—a cub who doesn't care, and doesn't mean to care about anything or anybody but himself. That's the supreme result of modern training,—it is 'pon my soul! Boys are brought up in the code of selfishness from the very beginning. Their mothers spoil them and foster all their bad points instead of their good ones,—and as soon as they begin to go about in the world, a lot of idiotic girls and women—the kind of women who *must* have a masculine thing to pay court to them, whether he be a raw youth or a seasoned old stager—get hold of them and make shameless love to them. And their heads are of course turned the wrong way round,—they think they are the most precious and amazing objects in all creation,—and instead of paying court to women, and learning to be chivalrous and reverential, they expect to be courted themselves and admired, as if they were full-blown heroes from the classic world of conquest. That's the way of it. Boy has no doubt caught the fever of conceit. He probably expected Miss Letty to kneel down and kiss his boot-ties."

"Part of your argument may be right," said the Major,—"but part of it is entirely wrong. You said in the beginning that we all of us make a mistake when

we think that love—love of any kind—will last. Did you not?"

"I did," admitted Fitz, looking slightly shamefaced under the calm stare of the Major's eye.

"Well, you know that's d——d nonsense!" pursued the Major bluntly. "You know as well as I do that I—I, for example, have loved the same woman ever since I was thirty, and there's no change in me yet. And Letty—Letty has loved the same ne'er-do-weel all her life, though he's a corpse and not a very entire one by this time I should say, though she thinks, God bless her, that he's a sort of angel-King on a throne in Heaven—which is a pleasing and pretty picture enough, only it doesn't seem to quite fit Harry Raikes. However, there you are, you see,—love does last—when it *is* love!"

"When it *is*—yes—but when *is* it?" asked Fitz, with the smile which so beautifully altered his features beginning to illumine his deep-set eyes. "You see, you and Miss Leslie are old-fashioned! That's what it is! You're old-fashioned, sir!" he repeated, getting up and prodding a finger into the Major's waistcoat. "You belong to the last century, like one's grandmother's old china! You are a part of the days when, if a married woman entertained a score of lovers apart from her own husband, she was considered a disgrace to her sex. All that is altered, my boy! She is now a 'queen of society'! Ha, ha, ha! You believe in God's blessing on true love!

But, my dear fellow, the present generation doesn't care whether there's a God to bless anything or not, or whether love is false or true. It isn't love, you see. It's something else. Love has gone out with the tinder-boxes and stage-coaches. It's all electricity and motor-cars now—flash and fizzle through life at a tearing pace, and leave a bad smell behind you! Ha, ha! You're old-fashioned, Dick! I like you for it because I'm a bit old-fashioned myself—but we're out of it,—we're old stumps of trees that can't understand the rank and quickly withering weeds of youth that are growing up around us to-day—weeds that are going to choke and poison the destinies of England by-and-by!"

The Major got up, possibly moved thereto by the pressure of his friend's fingers in the middle of his waistcoat.

"By that time you and I will be underground, Fitz," he said half-lightly, half-sadly. "And thank God for it!—for if any harm comes to England, I don't want to be alive to see it. I wonder if I shall be sitting on a gold throne in Heaven, next to Harry Raikes? If so, angel Letty will have to choose between us!"

He laughed,—and the two old friends presently left the club together and went for an afternoon stroll through Piccadilly and the Park, where they saw Miss Letty driving in her victoria with pretty Violet Morrison by her side. They raised their hats to both ladies, and Fitz commented on their looks.

"Nothing will ever make Miss Letty old," he said. "She always has the eyes of a child who trusts both God and man."

The Major nodded approvingly.

"That's very well said, Fitz,—and it's true,—but she's had a blow to-day. I'm sure she has. She doesn't say much—she's not one to say much,—she may say nothing, even to me,—but she's had a blow. Boy's not what she thought he would be. I've got a bit of a heartache over it. I'm sorry we came back to England!"

Fitz was silent. He fully understood and participated in his old friend's feelings, but he felt that the subject was too sore a one to be discussed, and when he spoke again it was on a different theme.

That evening Major Desmond escorted his niece and Miss Letty to the theatre, and just before starting, while Violet was still engaged in putting the finishing touches to her pretty evening toilette, Miss Letty came in alone to the Major, where he pensively waited in the sitting-room, and said softly,—

"Dick!"

He started, and turned round, and was fairly taken aback for the moment by the spiritual beauty of her gentle face framed in its snow-white hair. She was fully attired for the theatre, and wore an opera-mantle of some silvery neutral tint, showered with lace;—and a pretty flush came on her cheeks as she met the faithful tender gaze of the man who had loved her so

loyally and so long. Having expressed his admiration of her charm by a look, he responded,—

"Well, Letty?"

"I want you," she said, laying her delicately gloved hand on his arm, "to promise me one thing. Will you?"

"Anything and everything in the world!" said the Major recklessly.

"It is only just this,—do not talk to me at all, or ask me what I feel, about Boy." Her voice trembled a little,—then she went on,—"It is no use,—it only makes me think of what might have been and what is not. I am a little disappointed,—but then—what of that? We all have disappointments, and it is no use brooding upon them. We only make ourselves and others miserable. You see I loved Boy as a child;—he is not a child now—he is getting to be a young man,—and—he does not want me,—it is not natural he should want me. Do you understand?"

The Major was profoundly moved, but he only nodded and said,—

"Yes,—I understand!"

"He is just a college lad now,—like—like all the rest," went on Miss Letty quietly—"and it was my mistake to have expected him to be in any way different. He will no doubt turn out very well and be a good soldier. But"—and she suddenly looked up with a swift glance and smile that went straight to

the Major's heart—"he is Robert D'Arcy-Muir now, —he is not Boy!"

The Major said not a word, but he took up the little gloved hand resting on his arm and kissed it. A moment afterwards Violet entered, looking like a blush rose in a pretty gown of pink chiffon; and the two elderly folks, welcoming her presence as a relief from emotion and embarrassment, turned to admire her sweet and fresh appearance. And then they went to the theatre, and enjoyed "David Garrick," and the subject of Boy was avoided among them by mutual consent, both on that evening and for many a long day afterwards.

But he was not forgotten. Day after day, night after night, Miss Letty thought of him and wondered what he was doing, but she never heard whether he had passed his examination or not. His mother never wrote,—and he himself was evidently unmindful of his promise. Major Desmond, however, kept his eyes and ears open for news of him, not so much for the lad's own sake, as for Miss Letty's. He had friends at Sandhurst, and to them he confided his wish to know all the information they could get concerning "young D'Arcy-Muir," if he should eventually go there. To which he received the reply that if the young chap did get to Sandhurst at all, they would let him know. With this he had to be satisfied, knowing that it would be worse than useless to enquire about him from his parents, the Honourable

Jim being half paralysed, and Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir being incapable of giving a straight answer at any time to a straight question.

By-and-by, however, the attention of Major Desmond and Miss Letty began to be entirely engrossed by a new cause of anxiety and perplexity. Violet was looking ill, and getting pale and thin, and it was evident she was unhappy. Yet she never complained, and always tried to be cheerful, though it seemed an effort to her.

"Look here, Letty,—what is the matter with the girl?" asked the Major bluntly one day. "I have worried her to tell me, and she won't. Does she tell *you*?"

Miss Letty's kind face clouded, and her eyes grew very sorrowful.

"No, Dick, she has not actually told me, but I can guess. She has not heard from Max Nugent for a long time,—his letters have practically ceased."

"Ceased!" repeated the Major, getting very red. "What do you mean, Letty? Ceased?"

"She will not admit it," continued Miss Letty. "She will not own, even to herself, that he is neglecting her. When I ask her if she has heard from him, she answers me all in a nervous hurry, and assures me that it is because he is away travelling somewhere that she has received no letters. She says he has no time to write. But one would think that if he loved her as he professed to love

her, he would certainly find time, or make time to write."

"Of course he would!" said the Major brusquely. "There is no power on earth that can hinder a man from writing to the woman he loves. Even if he were ill or dying, he could get a friend to send a wire for him. No, no,—there is some humbug going on,—I am sure of it!" He took one or two rapid strides up and down the room. "Letty!" he said, stopping abruptly in front of her,—"when you were engaged to Harry Raikes did he write to you often?"

"Not as often as I should have liked," answered Miss Letty with a faint smile,—"but then you see he was in India,—that is a long way off—and of course he could not possibly write by every mail."

"Couldn't he?" And the Major gave a curious grunt of incredulity. "Why not?"

"If he could he would have done so," said Miss Letty gently but firmly. "I am sure of that."

The Major walked up and down the room, loyally battling against the temptation which assailed him to tell her the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

"You never doubted him?" he asked suddenly.

"Doubted him!" And Miss Letty's eyes opened in mild half-reproachful amazement. "Never! How can you suggest such a thing! I knew how true and good he was, and how much he loved me,—and that is why I have devoted all my life to his memory."

Up and down, up and down, once more strode the

Major, and at the third turn the temptation was conquered and he was himself again.

"Then according to your experience, Letty, Violet ought not to doubt Max Nugent, because he has, as you say, practically ceased writing to her?"

Miss Letty looked puzzled.

"Well, I don't know what to say," she answered. "You see they are not engaged,—you would not consent to an engagement till Mr. Nugent had proved his sincerity,—and I think you were wise; but as matters now stand, the child cannot insist on his writing to her. She has no hold upon him, save that of his professed love and honour."

"That ought to be a strong hold," said the Major. "Honour especially. No man has a right to win a woman's love and then throw it away again. I must speak to Violet."

And he did. He called unexpectedly one morning to take her to a Picture Exhibition, and after sauntering about the galleries a little, he sat down in a retired corner with her and put his first question very gently.

"Violet, when did you last hear from Nugent?"

The girl coloured hotly.

"Some time ago."

"How long ago?"

"I forget," she answered listlessly.

Her face was bent, and he could not see it under the shadow of her hat.

"Violet!"

Slowly she raised her head,—her eyes were full of tears. The Major smothered an oath and strove to speak calmly.

"Look here, child: you can trust me, can't you?"

"Yes, uncle," she murmured inaudibly.

"Well, don't fret. Be a brave little woman. *I* will see to this for you. It is no good living in suspense. Better know the worst at once!"

Violet furtively dashed away her teardrops, and looked at him anxiously.

"The worst . . .?" she murmured.

The Major squared his shoulders resolutely.

"Look here, Violet: when we have to swallow a dose of bitter medicine, we don't like it, but if we are told it will save our lives, we do it. Now, in this affair of Max Nugent, the sooner your medicine is swallowed the better. I am afraid the man is not sincere. What do you yourself think about it?"

Violet sighed deeply.

"I do not understand it," she said, in rather a tremulous voice. "I have written to him several times, but have had no reply. You may as well know all. The last letter I had from him was quite two months ago, and in that he said he was coming to Europe immediately—to Paris first—and he promised to come on to London afterwards and see me."

"And was that letter exactly what you expected

it to be?" asked the Major, looking at her narrowly. "Was it all that you had a right to expect?"

Violet hesitated, then answered truthfully,—

"No. It was just the letter—of a friend."

The Major rose.

"Come along now," he said. "I will see into this for you. A millionaire like Nugent can't hide his light under a bushel. I will find out where he is, and see him myself, if I have to cross the ocean to do it."

Violet looked up at him with tearful eyes.

"You *are* good to me, uncle!" she said; "but—you know—if he does not care for me any more——"

"You do not care for him!" finished the Major. "That's what you must say, and that is what you must feel."

The girl shook her head.

"Ah, you may shake your head!" said Desmond, "but I am not going to let you waste your life as Miss Letty has wasted hers, all for the love of a rascal. You do not know Letty's history. I do. She was engaged to a man I knew, and when he was out in India well away from her he was getting ready to marry some one else and throw her over. But he caught fever and died—just in time. Letty never knew that he had been false to her. *I* knew—but I never told her. And I never mean to tell."

Violet laid her hand on his arm caressingly.

"Uncle! And you loved her yourself!"

"Now how did you find that out?" said the Major

with a little smile. "Well! You are right—I have loved her nearly all my life. And we have rubbed on pretty well as friends together—and we have kept the memory of that dead rascal as holy as if he were a saint. So you see I know something about love and loyalty, little girl—and I can enter thoroughly into your feelings. But fortunately you are very young, and if Nugent turns out a failure your heart will be sore for a while, but it will mend."

"Never, uncle!" said Violet. "I can never care for any one else."

"Nonsense!" said the Major. "You must not talk like that at nineteen. This is your first love, I grant —but one gets over first love like the measles."

"Did you?" asked Violet anxiously.

"God bless my soul! Of course I did. When I was nineteen I fell in love with my father's cook. She was a very pretty woman, and made jam puffs divinely. She married the grocer round the corner,— and somehow I lived through it. I was nearly thirty when I found Letty—and I have loved *her* ever since."

Violet pressed his arm but said nothing.

"Now come along," said the Major cheerfully. "Don't worry yourself, thin yourself, or lose your looks. Nobody will thank you for that except your kind female friends. We will clear this little matter up somehow. And I am sure you are far too high-spirited and straightforward to care for a man who turns out to be

a dishonourable scamp—though mind, I don't say he *is* dishonourable till I have proved it. But unless he has been kidnapped for his millions by brigands, I don't see any excuse for his silence. If he were ill he could send you word,—so there is only one inference to be drawn from his conduct, and that is, that he doesn't mean to keep his promise to you. It is hard for you to look at it in that light, but you must try, Violet—you must try. If he does turn out a villain, I will take care he gets a jolly good horsewhipping."

Violet uttered an exclamation.

"Oh no, uncle!"

"'Oh no, uncle?'—I say 'Oh yes, uncle!' Leave this to me, child! There are too many scamps sneaking about in society embittering and spoiling the lives of innocent women, and a few sound thrashings on the backs of such fellows would be pure joy and relief to the feelings of the majority. I should like to thrash a millionaire!—especially if his conduct is on the level of a play-actor, who is the worst kind of unprincipled rogue between this world and the nearest gallows." And the Major chuckled. "I *did* thrash one of those painted fellows once, and by Jove!—how I enjoyed it!"

Violet looked up at him timidly with a faint smile.

"It was in India," said the Major, his eyes twinkling and his cheeks beginning to crease up with wrinkles of satisfaction at the recollection. "There came what was supposed to be a tiptop theatrical company to

the place where we were, and among the players there was a thin, white-faced fellow, as conceited as they make them, who 'made up' to look a king or a villain, whichever you fancied—though, to my mind, the villain suited his style of beauty best. Well, when he was off the stage, he pretended to be a very fine gentleman indeed,—explained that he had taken to the stage as a freak—that his mother had nearly broken her heart over it, and all that sort of ancient stock-in-trade nonsense; and he pushed himself by degrees into the society of the women, till he came across a little creature who was fascinated by his artful ways, thought him a budding 'genius,' and listened to his long stories as if he were an angel singing. And then he poured out more confidences: he told her how he had in an evil hour married a woman he could not love, and that she—the little creature aforesaid—was his own true mate, and all that kind of gibberish. Poor little soul!—she believed him, and was for immolating herself on the altar of what she believed to be an 'ideal' passion. Only there happened to be another little creature round, to whom he had told the selfsame tale, and she, having more spirit in her than the first one, came to me and told me all about it. 'And I have written letters to him!' she said, stamping her little foot and flashing her pretty eyes—'and he won't give them back—the coward!' 'What do you want me to do, my dear?' I said. 'Thrash him!' she replied. And of course

I did. I went for him one day when he was tripping gingerly out on his tiptoes from the place where he put his rouge and false legs on. I said, 'Look here, Hamlet—King Richard—As you Like It—or whatever you are,—you are a scoundrel! Make yourself into all the people that ever blessed or disgraced the world, you are an unprincipled cad! I am not Hamlet, thank God!—I am a British officer, and though you are not worth kicking, you are worth whipping for the fun of it. Now, Hamlet, look out!' He smiled pallidly, and said 'Sir!'—but the rest of his sentence was lost. I forget what happened afterwards, till I saw him picked up by two coolies, and carried off. He couldn't act for some time afterwards,—he was ill with a kind of influenza! But I got back the girl's letters for her."

The Major laughed heartily over this reminiscence, and enjoyed himself very much for several minutes, till he noticed the pretty pensive face of the girl at his side. Then he scolded himself violently and called himself a brute for not considering her feelings more tenderly.

"Come, come, don't be downhearted, little woman!" he said kindly. "Take a bright face to Miss Letty. She has her own trouble to bear—and I can see she frets over it too, though she never mentions it, and has asked me not to talk to her about it. But I am sure she had set a good many of her hopes on Boy."

"Ah, yes!" and Violet's quick sympathy showed

itself in her expressive face. "I know how disappointed she was in him! She had been building up an ideal 'Boy' who did not exist."

"And you have perhaps been building up an ideal Max who does not exist," said her uncle good-humouredly. "What a pity it is that all the best and nicest women in the world will persist in imagining men to be so much better than they are! We don't deserve it—we always fail to come up to the required standard."

"Not always," said Violet, her eyes beaming on him affectionately. "You never fail!"

The Major laughed.

"Oh, don't idealise *me*, for Heaven's sake, child!" he said. "I am just a bluff old man with a highly inflammable temper and an average sense of honour that's all. Now try and put your sad thoughts away for the present, and take Miss Letty for your example,—you can't do better. Always bright, always patient, always brave,—she takes everything God sends her in the same equable spirit, and does her best to keep a cheerful heart and cheerful face through everything."

"Yes—but remember," said Violet tremulously, "thanks to you, she has never known that her lover was false to her!"

The Major was taken aback by this pathetic observation, and pulled his white moustache dismally.

"True!—I forgot! She has never known."

He gave a compassionate side-glance at his niece, and said no more. They returned to the hotel in silence,—but that afternoon Violet had a long quiet chat with Miss Letty all alone and told her frankly all the extent of her troubles, doubts and fears. After this her heart was considerably relieved, and she felt more resigned. For Miss Letty was the wisest and tenderest of counsellors, and out of the store of her life's experience she was able to bring many consolations and suggestions of peace.

But the storm which had been so mysteriously gathering over Violet's life was ready to break more suddenly and heavily than either of her kind guardians knew,—and scarcely a week had elapsed since her talk with her uncle Desmond, when the fashionable worlds of London, Paris and New York were electrified by what was set forth late one evening in bold headlines on all the newspaper placards as "Great Society Scandal." Major Desmond heard the news first at his club, and promptly clapping on his hat, took a hansom, and urging its driver to his utmost speed, dashed through the streets to Miss Letty's house in Hans Place, whither she had recently returned to set things in order after her vacating tenants.

"Where's Violet?" he demanded, as he burst into the drawing-room and startled his gentle old friend out of a mild little doze in her arm-chair.

Miss Letty gazed at him affrighted.

"My dear Dick! What is the matter? Violet is out. She has gone to the theatre with some friends."

The Major sank into the nearest chair with a groan.

"Then it's all up!" he said. "She will hear everything before she gets home!"

Miss Letty gazed at him, hopelessly bewildered.

"Hear what? You alarm me, Dick! Is anything wrong?"

And she trembled from head to foot as she laid a hand pleadingly on his arm. He looked up at her, and saw how nervous she was,—how her slight worn old frame shook with the agitation she sought to repress, and he at once cursed himself for his impetuous brusquerie.

"What a brute I am to frighten you!" he said, getting up as quickly as he had sat down, and taking her hand tenderly in his own. "Come back to your chair, Letty,—sit down,—there now!—don't tremble so! You will want all your strength to help Violet, poor child! That d——d Nugent has run off with Lord Wantyn's wife—the low rascal! If I ever get hold of him I will——"

He stopped, silenced by a gesture from Miss Letty's trembling hand.

"Wait a minute, Dick," she said faintly. "I don't quite grasp it. Do you mean to say that Max Nugent,—the man who professed to love, and asked

to marry our little innocent Violet,—has taken another man's wife away from him?"

The Major nodded violently.

"Yes—it's in all the papers. Wantyn's wife, 'the beautiful Lady Wantyn,' as the feminine asses of the fashion papers call her. He has taken her—or she has gone with him—one is as bad as 'tother. Anyhow they are off—sloped from Paris last night, reached the South of France this morning—Nugent's yacht was waiting for him at Marseilles—and they are away, the Lord knows where! And everybody will sympathise with the miserable cad because he is a millionaire. I tell you it is in all the papers—and one penny-a-liner has already put in print that it is the outcome of an 'old and romantic' love affair! Old and romantic! By Jove! A little old and romantic treatment of the right sort would do them both good,—a few of the old and romantic notions which put a bullet through a rascal's head, and whipped a bad wife at the cart's tail! That would be the proper 'old and romantic' way to deal with them!"

But Miss Letty sat very still, her hands clasped in her lap,—her eyes full of pain.

"My poor Violet!" she murmured at last. "Poor little girl! Dick, what shall we do?"

"I don't know," said the Major despairingly. "I came here post haste to ask you to keep the newspapers away from her for a day or two,—but it's no

use now—if she has gone to the theatre she will see Nugent's name on all the placards. And if she does by chance miss it, one of her friends will be sure to see it and tell her."

"You forget, Dick," said Miss Letty, "that no one in England knows of Max Nugent's connection with her, and only two or three in America. That is very fortunate! How wise you were in not allowing any engagement to take place! You have saved Violet much indignity. It is true the poor child will have to bear her trouble alone, but I think that is better than if she had to endure the possibly contemptuous pity of her friends."

"Yes, that's true," said the Major. "There would be no real sympathy whatever for her,—all the feeling in our latter-day social sets goes out to the money-bags. Nugent's a villain,—but he will be turned into a hero by the time Wantyn gets his divorce. Didn't I tell you I never liked that glass in his eye?"

Miss Letty could not smile. She was thinking of Violet. She glanced at the clock.

"Violet will soon be coming back," she said. Poor, poor Violet! I dread seeing her face! I think I should have died if my Harry had been false to me!"

The Major was here afflicted with a violent cough, which kept him barking hoarsely for some minutes.

"Dear me!" said Miss Letty, solicitously watching

him as he got redder and redder in the face and kept on coughing. "I am afraid you have caught cold, Dick! Did you have your overcoat on when you came just now?"

"Yes, I had everything on," said the Major, still struggling with the strange obstruction in his throat. "Everything that was necessary." Here he suddenly recovered himself and relapsed into calm. "When do you think Violet will be back?"

"She cannot be later than eleven or half-past," replied Miss Letty. "But we must be very careful. She may not have seen the news as yet."

"I am afraid there is no hope of that," said Desmond bitterly. "It is all over the place. You know what these wretched papers are,—anything to sell their copies. A scandal is treated to the biggest headlines, just as the dress of a stage woman gets more notice than the death of a great man. Oh, she's seen it, you may be sure!"

Miss Letty clasped and unclasped her hands nervously.

"We must be brave, Dick," she murmured. "We must not let her see us break down—we must not pity her too much."

"Pity her!" ejaculated the Major. "I feel more like congratulating her on a narrow escape from getting a bad husband. Only it won't do to put it that way. She might think it unkind——"

"Hush!" said Miss Letty, lifting a warning finger

and growing very pale, as the wheels of a carriage came to a stop outside. "There she is!"

The Major held his breath, listening. Violet's clear young voice could be heard distinctly saying—"Good-night! Thanks for a delightful evening."

The Major turned his eyes round amazedly on Miss Letty.

"'A delightful evening!' She cannot have heard——"

The door-bell rang, and to the two elderly people who were in such suspense, its peal seemed to waken loud and discordant echoes through the house, suggestive of everything horrible. Another minute, and Violet entered—looking no longer merely pretty, but radiantly beautiful. Her eyes were dark and brilliant,—her cheeks were flushed,—she held her little head up like a queen, and her light step as she advanced was almost regal in its pride and grace.

"Uncle Desmond!" she exclaimed, smiling—"You here!"

The Major instinctively scrambled out of his chair and reverentially stared at the dazzling creature who seemed to be suddenly transformed from a mere slip of a girl into an exquisite woman.

"Yes—I am here!" he stammered.

Violet loosened her cloak, threw it aside, and put her arms round his neck and kissed him, still smiling into his eyes with such a straight sweet look that he was quite bewildered. Then she dropped on her

knees by Miss Letty's chair, and raised her fair young face to the equally fair old one bending so anxiously over her.

"Darling Miss Letty!" she said. "Why did you sit up for me? You must be tired! My own Miss Letty! And Uncle Desmond coming here so late too!"

They glanced at one another, silent and sorely puzzled. Did she know? Or did she not know? What was it that made her so unusually royal and proud in her bearing? Still kneeling by Miss Letty, she looked up at the perplexed Major with that new and wonderful brilliancy in her eyes which seemed to be the reflection of a strong soul-flame within, and said,—

"Dearest uncle! Don't be unhappy about me! I know what brought you here to-night—I know everything!"

"You do, Violet?" murmured Miss Letty, catching the girl's hand in hers—"Are you sure you do?"

"Am I sure?" And Violet sprang up from her kneeling position, and stood with her fair head thrown back and her whole face expressing a grand disdain—"Indeed I am! I am sure that the man I thought a gentleman, is beneath contempt! I am sure that the love I bore him for what I thought his goodness, his chivalry, his honour, was the love for a fancied being of my own heart who did not exist! I am sure that I do not, and could not love a man

who has deliberately disgraced himself and ruined the honour of a woman! I am sure—yes—that if I met Max Nugent now I would pass him by as beneath the notice of an honest girl! I mean it!" continued Violet, her eyes glowing more brilliantly than ever with the intensity of her thought. "Yes! for though I am only a girl, I have never done any harm to any one that I know of, nor would I hurt any one by so much as a word if I could help it, and so far at least I am above this millionaire, who has made himself too mean for even a *man* to know!"

The Major brought his hand down with a vigorous slap on the table near which he stood.

"There spoke Jack Morrison's girl!" he exclaimed. "Blood will out! you have got your father's mettle in you! Bravo! Let the fellow go to the dogs in his own way and be d——d to him!—excuse me!"

"Wait, uncle!" said Violet, looking at Miss Letty's pained and anxious face with great tenderness in her eyes. "You must not think I don't suffer! I do! When I saw that horrible news to-night—when I heard people talking of it, I felt like killing myself! Yes!"—for Miss Letty uttered a piteous exclamation,—"Yes, dear Miss Letty, you must not think I don't feel. I feel cruelly!" Her lips trembled, her voice shook. "But you have both been so good to me—you have taken such care of me, that I should be a wicked, ungrateful girl if I thought of myself only. I think of *you*—dear kind Uncle Desmond!—darling

sweet Miss Letty! and I will try to bear it bravely, I will indeed! I am trying now. Don't you see I am? My heart is wounded, and the wound hurts—yes, it hurts! But I will try—I will try hard, that the pain may make me better!"

And here, her pride breaking down entirely, she fell again on her knees beside Miss Letty, and buried her head in her lap, sobbing bitterly. Quietly Miss Letty laid her two hands over the soft hair, stroking it gently,—and controlling her own tears, she made a gentle sign to the stricken Major to go. With a mute glance of farewell tenderness, that gallant officer stole out of the room on tiptoe,—and pausing in the hall outside, wiped his eyes and blew his nose guardedly lest he should make too much noise.

"God bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "These women beat everything! Break their hearts, and they say the pain shall make them better! 'Pon my soul! What brutes we men are—what revolting, dirty, selfish, downright brutes! We don't deserve ever to have had mothers. Here, let me get out of this!"

And opening the street door gingerly, he closed it as gingerly after him, and stood for a moment in the street with the guilty air of a burglar who had just abstracted some valuable plate. And again he blew his nose—with greater freedom and vigour this time.

"Poor little girl!" he murmured. "Poor little Violet! Only nineteen!—and faces the music like

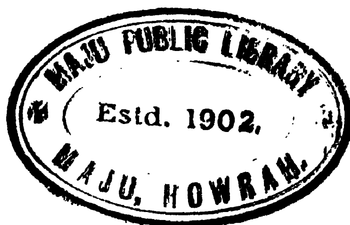
an old warrior of a hundred battles! Brave child—brave child! And by Jove, what a beauty she's growing! A positive beauty! Never noticed it till to-night, 'pon my soul."

And a couple of lines suddenly came into his head as it seemed from nowhere,—lines he remembered vaguely, as having heard when quite a lad:

> " . . . This is truth the poet sings,
> That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

"That's it!" he said. "That's what's the matter with her! She is crowned with that crown—poor little Violet! And by Jove she wears it royally! And she will rule her sorrow and conquer it with a fine strength and firm spirit,—and she will be a queen among women yet!—my little broken-hearted girl!"

And he wafted a kiss back to the windows of Miss Letty's house as he pulled his hat over his eyes and walked away.



CHAPTER XI

AFTER a storm comes a calm, and the old proverbs which tell us that the longest lane must have a turning and the darkest cloud a silver lining are not without something of a cheery note in their constant reiteration, like the repeated warble of a thrush telling us of the certainty of spring. And Violet Morrison soon began to prove these old-fashioned truths for herself, though the sudden and ruthless destruction of her first love dream had cast a shadow over the bright opening of her life, and had made her graver and more thoughtful than her youth and beauty warranted. Her troubles were none the less hard to bear, when the recalcitrant Max Nugent, weary of his connection with Lady Wantyn, promptly severed it as soon as her husband divorced that famous "beauty," and sought to make his peace with the innocent girl whom he had so deeply wronged. Again and again he wrote to her and implored her to forgive him and to marry him,—but she answered none of his letters. The first faith and devotion of her heart were killed, and she knew she could never trust him, but he very persistently urged a renewal of his attentions in

spite of the curt return of his letters through the Major's hands, and she was therefore very glad when her uncle and Miss Letty decided to take her abroad for a time on a tour through France, Italy and Spain, as this gave her freedom, and an escape from the constant pleading of her former lover. The interest in new countries, and the constant distraction of thought caused by the various wonders and beauties of the shifting panorama, served as an excellent mental and moral tonic, and braced up all the energies of her mind. They stayed abroad, residing sometimes in one beautiful place, sometimes another, for about three years, and it was while they were wintering in Palermo in the last year of their wanderings that the Major received a letter which gave him the burden of another secret which he had to keep from Miss Letty in addition to the one concerning the "dead rascal" Harry Raikes. The letter was from an old friend and fellow-officer, and among other items of the news he gave was the following:—

"By the way, you asked me to tell you if I ever heard any news of D'Arcy-Muir's son. I have heard something, and I expect it won't please you. He passed by the skin of his teeth into Sandhurst,—and the other day was expelled for being drunk and kicking up a disorderly row. It is a bad job for the young chap, but what's in the blood will out—and I suppose he has caught the drink disease from

his father. He has ruined his military career at the outset."

Long and deeply did the good Major ponder over this piece of depressing intelligence. He read it in the courtyard of the hotel in Palermo where they were just then staying, a courtyard which, as is the custom in Southern climes, presented the appearance of a fairy flower-garden, festooned with climbing plants in blossom, with oranges ripening in the warm sun, and odours of mimosa, heliotrope and violets on the air. "Expelled for being drunk"! The news seemed an infamy and an insult, in such a scene of beauty as that which he looked upon.

"God bless my soul!" he murmured disconsolately, fixing his eyes on a fair cluster of white clematis swinging above his head. "It seems to me that some of us aren't fit to inhabit this planet! There's everything beautiful in it, and everything is wisely ordained,—and it is only we who make the mischief and create the trouble. 'Expelled for being drunk'! And that kind of thing ends in being expelled from the world altogether before one has served one's time. What would Letty say!"

He sighed heavily,—but in a few minutes of consideration decided that it would be worse than foolish to tell her.

"Let her keep her little ideal somewhere in her heart," he said to himself. "Don't let me be such a great blundering idiot as to smudge all the picture

out for her. She believes in Harry Raikes,—she may as well believe in Boy as long as she can. And if anyone tells her what's happened, it won't be me!"

And he steadily adhered to this resolution. It was easy to do so, as Boy's name was never mentioned by Miss Letty now, and all her thoughts seemed taken up with Violet. He put away his friend's letter unanswered, carefully marking the date on which he received it,—and as he calculated that Boy must be getting on now for twenty, he shook his head and decided that everything, so far as "that unfortunate young chap" was concerned, was rather hopeless.

"However, it's no use blaming the lad himself too severely," he considered—"He has had everything against him—his parents have both shown him the worst of examples. His nature was warped at its very commencement and in its very growing—and if he takes to the bottle like his father and runs down-hill at a tearing speed, the fault doesn't rest entirely with him."

In the spring of that same year they returned to London, and "settled down," as the saying is, in order that Violet might take up the career her heart was pining for—that of a thoroughly trained nurse. She was never happier than when she could soothe pain and alleviate suffering, and she was altogether eminently fitted for the profession she sought to adopt. Miss Letty did not deter her, nor did her

uncle, for they both saw that work and active interest in the welfare of others was the only way to make her life interesting to herself. She had really no need to work, for Miss Letty had, though Violet knew it not, left her a considerable fortune in her will, and of course Major Desmond, though not a rich man, had made over to her everything he possessed,—but the fact of having money is not sufficient to fill lives which are strong and earnest, and which would fain prove to God that they are worth living. So Violet with her firm faith, pure heart and gentle manner, went into the forests of difficulty, unarmed and fair as Una in Spenser's famous poem, and studied hard, consecrating herself heart and soul to the work she had undertaken, with the usual result of all earnest endeavour—complete success. Max Nugent had long ceased to importune her for the mending of the broken threads of affection,—and of this she was glad. Her disappointment in her first love had, however, deprived her of any interest or expectation of marriage for herself,—in fact the idea had become repugnant to her mind. One day her uncle asked her,—

"Are you going to devote all your life to the memory of Max Nugent, as Letty has devoted hers to the lost and gone Harry Raikes?"

Violet smiled.

"No, uncle. *I* have been undeceived—Miss Letty keeps her illusion. I never think of Max now."

"Well, do you ever think of anybody else?" demanded the Major.

"No."

"Why not?"

Violet laughed outright.

"Dearest uncle! I cannot fall in love to order! I don't much like the men I see,—they don't want me, and I don't want them. Leave me alone to work, dear uncle,—I love my work—I am useful—I can help a great many people to bear their troubles,—and it will be all right for me. If I am to marry, why, I shall,—if not, I shan't."

And she kissed him and slipped away.

Meanwhile, in the self-same monster metropolis of London, where Violet went daily to her work in the hospital—where the Major divided his days between his club and Miss Letty's always charming house—and where Miss Letty herself, growing more feeble and ailing with years, was content to sit very much at home with her embroidery,—Boy, who had unconsciously been a link in the chain of their three lives, was drifting like a wreck in a vast ocean. The terrible blow of his expulsion from Sandhurst had been taken by his parents as a deadly injury to themselves,—and for the shame, the misery, the utter breaking-down of the lad's own life and ambitions, they, his progenitors, took no thought and had no pity. The Honourable Jim, half-paralysed as he was, had plenty of strength left for swearing, and

used oaths in plenty to his son, calling him a "d——d low rascal."

"You don't seem to belong to me at all!" he shouted, his red face becoming purple with rage and excitement. "D——n it, sir, I am a gentleman—my father was a gentleman, but you—you are a blackguard, sir! D——n it!—when I took my glass I took it like a gentleman, I didn't go about disgracing myself and my profession as you have done. You had better enlist if they'll have you. Anyhow you must do something for your bread—I can't afford to keep you!"

Boy heard in absolute silence. He was too completely scornful of life and the ways of life to care to remind his father that he himself had been one long disgrace to his son from that son's babyhood—and that his paralytic condition was altogether owing to his indulgence in strong drink,—What was the good? More oaths and a redder face would be the sole result. And his mother? Had she one word of pardon or of sympathy for him in his deep humiliation? Not she! Embedded in fat, all she could do was to shake her double chin at him over a mountain of maternal bosom.

"It's always the way," she said, dabbing a handkerchief into her eyes, "when good mothers do everything for their sons! They have to suffer! You have broken my heart, Boy!—your mother's heart! All my hopes of you are ruined! I don't feel as if

you were *my* Boy! I'm sure I don't know what you are going to do. We have no fortune, as you are perfectly aware—we can't afford to keep you idling about, doing nothing!"

Boy, tall, pale, handsome, and with an indefinable air of languor and scorn about him, smiled wearily.

"Don't trouble yourself, mother!" he said. "I will earn enough bread to keep me alive, if I do it by sweeping a crossing. Good-bye!"

"Where are you going?" demanded his mother, somewhat frightened at his set face and blazing eyes.

"Do you care?" And he laughed bitterly. "I'm going—to the devil, I suppose!"

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir moaned and dabbed her eyes again.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she wailed. "When I think of all the sacrifices I have made to send you to college—and all the trouble I have had, really it seems too dreadful! A mother's life is martyrdom—complete martyrdom! Why don't you go and hunt up old Miss Letty?"

Then, and quite suddenly, Boy flared up. "Miss Letty! The Miss Letty who wanted to adopt me as a child—and you wouldn't let her? Not I! It would have been a jolly sight better for me perhaps if I had been with her—but to go to her now—now, when I am expelled"—he choked at the word and had a struggle to go on—"and in disgrace,—now! No, mother, never!"

With a strange gesture, half of fury, half of despair, he turned and left her and went out of the house. His mother was far too unwieldy and comfortable in herself to rise from her chair and enquire where he was going, and though she called "Boy!" once as he disappeared, he did not hear her.

He had two or three pounds in his pocket, and rather than put up with any more useless reproaches and complaints at home, he decided to take a cheap lodging somewhere near the Strand, and seek for work,—any kind of work.

"It's all the same," he said with a sort of cynical philosophy which had come of "cramming" and the weariness resulting from that pernicious system—"whether one sweeps out an office or controls it, work of every kind is simply work. It only differs in the quality and the pay."

In a few days, through the help of a young fellow he had known at Sandhurst, one who was unaffectedly sorry for his disgrace, he got a place as assistant clerk in an agency office. It was dull business, but he drudged through it uncomplainingly, and earned enough to keep himself going. Sometimes a vague idea occurred to him that he would go on the stage.

"Everyone does that when they are down on their luck!" he said. "I might begin as a super. But if I began as one I expect I should stay as one, for I haven't an idea of acting. However, some people

would say that is an advantage. Because if you *can* act, you may never get an engagement!"

He took to going to the theatre of an evening, and studying the various antics and grimaces of all the puppets in the different shows. Sometimes it amused him,—more often it bored him. But for a lonely and downhearted lad as he was, it was better to sit among human beings in the warmth and light, with the sound of music about him, than to be all alone in his cheap lodging, brooding on his miseries. One night he saw a very pretty little play performed, in which the heroine was a maiden lady who had made the mistake of loving where she was not loved. Something—a mere trifle of pathos—a touch of sentiment in one scene, suddenly called Miss Letty to his mind. Quite involuntarily, and almost as if his brain had taken to acting independently of himself, he began to retrace his life, and follow it backward step by step to his childhood's days, till gradually, very gradually, small incidents and circumstances began to arrange themselves like the pieces of a puzzle, and he remembered a number of things he had long forgotten. Again he saw himself rambling down by the sea-shore, a solitary, sad little fellow, talking to Rattling Jack,—again he saw Miss Letty's house in Scotland; and the memory of the last walk he had taken with her there through the Pass of Achray came back to him as freshly as if it had only happened yesterday.

Though his eyes were fixed on the stage he saw

an entirely different picture from that which the actors were representing—a picture which had been blurred and blotted out from his mind for many years by the heavy mass of information which had been thrown at him to digest as best he might in the shortest possible time. This obscuration of mental faculty was beginning to clear like a thick fog away from the mirror of his brain, and with a strange pang of regret he recalled the gentle face, the soft voice, the sweet and kindly ways of the good woman who had loved him so much when a child. As soon as the play was ended he got up and went out with the rest, but lingered near the theatre door while the crowd of fashionable and unfashionable folk were hustling themselves and each other into cabs and carriages, watching each face as it passed by and wondering if by chance Miss Letty might be among them. Or if not, perhaps Major Desmond, to whom he would at once tell his miserable story,—the story of his disgrace at Sandhurst, which had not been so much his fault as that of a "superior" officer who had tempted him to drink and had laughed at him when drunk, himself escaping scot-free when the matter was inquired into, and the unhappy boy whom he had led to ruin was expelled. Yes—it might be well to confide in Major Desmond,—he would do so, he resolved, the very next day. With a deep sigh he roused himself from his reverie, and moved away from the threshold of the corridor to the theatre,

where he had been standing, when suddenly his arm was touched timidly and a sweet anxious voice said,—

"I beg your pardon!—but would you mind——! Might I ask you to find me a cab? I have missed my father in the crowd—I am all alone!"

He turned and looked at the speaker, and was quite startled by the exquisite beauty of the face uplifted to his own. Such large eloquent dark eyes!—such beautiful black curly hair!—such an exquisite complexion!—a smile that fairly dazzled him!—and a figure of the most girlish and fairylike grace to crown and complete all these attractions! Hastily he raised his cap, and blushed hotly at the extreme honour he felt at being spoken to by such a beautiful woman.

"Do you mind?" murmured the fair one again. "I am afraid it is very dreadful of me to ask you!—but papa must have taken the carriage—he must have thought I had gone home with some other friends who were here to-night. And I do feel so very nervous,—I have never been left alone anywhere!"

Boy started from his stupor of admiration into instant action.

"I'll get you a cab directly—of course I will," he said. "Just sit down here in the corridor—it's very draughty though, I am afraid—won't you catch cold?"

"I have a warm cloak, thank you," said the bewitching siren, smiling up at him. "Thank you *so* much!"

"A hansom or a four-wheeler?" asked Boy.

"Oh, anything! I am *so* sorry to trouble you!"

Boy dashed off into the street. It never for a moment occurred to him that the young lady could just as well have asked the same attention from one of the stalwart policemen on guard near the theatre door, and that perhaps it would have been more in keeping with the proprieties if she had done so. He soon secured a hansom, the smartest and cleanest he could find, and ran back to the charming creature who had so confidingly thrown herself upon his protection.

"Oh thank you! But won't you come with me?" said the beautiful heroine of this dramatic incident. "Please *do*! Come home and see papa! He will be *so* glad!" Nothing could have been more winning than the innocent and childlike way in which she gave this invitation. She made it all the more irresistible by pressing her little daintily gloved fingers on Boy's arm,—a touch which thrilled him through and through.

"I shall be so frightened," she went on, "in a cab all alone! Please see me home, if only to the door!"

"All right," said Boy resolutely. "I'll come!"

He assisted her into the hansom with the greatest tenderness, and carefully tucked her pretty skirts about her tiny feet,—oh! what charming skirts, all soft and silken and frilled and rustling, like the leaves of fringed French poppies!

"What address?" he inquired.

She gave him a number and street near Sloane Square, and he, confiding the same to the cabman, sprang in beside her, and they rattled away together through the streets, Boy delighted with the adventure and the pleasure of being chosen as the protector and cavalier of so fascinating a being as his companion.

"Isn't this fun?" she said, her eyes sparkling like jewels in the light reflected from the cab lamps. "I feel so safe now! You ought to know my name, I think. Shall I tell you?"

"If you don't mind," answered Boy, still troubled by a tendency to blush at his own temerity—"I should like to know it, so that I might remember it—and you—always!"

This was a fairly good hit, and was promptly responded to on the part of the fair one, by a modest droop of the head and tender side glance.

"How sweet of you to say—*that*!" she murmured, "but I am afraid you will soon forget. My name is Lenore de Gramont. I am the only daughter of a French nobleman, the Marquis de Gramont."

Boy blushed more hotly than ever. What a position for him! Here he was, in a hansom cab, with the daughter of a French Marquis! He did not know whether he ought to be proud or humiliated!

"Papa is a very clever man"—went on the charming Lenore confidingly,—"he has a beautiful castle in France, but he is so fond of England—oh, *so* fond!—

He would rather live in quite little apartments in England than in a palace in France!"

"Really!" said Boy.

"Yes! And he is so fond of Englishmen. He adores them! You are English?"

"Yes," answered Boy. "My name is Robert D'Arcy-Muir. I am the only son of the Honourable James D'Arcy-Muir.

"The Honourable?" queried Lenore with a fascinating uplifting of her delicate eyebrows. "Ah yes, that is one of your English distinctions—so grand and meaning so much! Our titles in France mean nothing!"

"I have been in France," said Boy.

"Have you? Did you like it?"

"I was only at school there when a boy," he replied. "The school was near the sea-coast in Brittany."

"Ah, dear Brittany! So charming—so picturesque —so poetic!"

"Well, I can't say much about that," said Boy. "I was there just for a year,—but I didn't care about it. The boys were rather a bad lot."

"It was perhaps a bad school," said the daughter of the Marquis, with a little laugh. "Oh, you must not be too severe about my dear Brittany! Here we are! Do come in!"

Boy helped her out of the cab, and as she sprang lightly to the ground she looked up with tender

entreaty in her eyes and repeated the words. "Do come in!"

Boy hesitated,—then paid the cabman and dismissed him.

"Do you think your father—the Marquis——" he stammered uneasily.

"He will be charmed!" said the captivating Lenore. "Come—I will take no denial. You must have supper with us—come!" And almost before he knew how it happened, Boy found himself in the highly decorated hall of a small flat, bowing to a stoutly built gentleman with a red face and a superabundance of moustache, whom Lenore introduced as—

"My father, the Marquis de Gramont!"

And while Boy made his bashful salute, father and daughter exchanged a profane wink which had their guileless guest observed, would certainly have surprised him.

"Dear papa!" said Lenore then, in her pretty caressing voice, "how could you leave me behind at the theatre in that cruel way? What were you thinking about? This is Mr. Robert D'Arcy-Muir, the son of the Honourable Mr. D'Arcy-Muir, who was good enough to get me a hansom and bring me home,—and if he hadn't been so kind to me, where do you suppose I should have been, you naughty papa!"

By this time the Marquis appeared to understand and grasp the position.

"My dear, I am very sorry!" he said in smooth deep accents—"very sorry! I really thought you had gone home with our other friends! But you have been most fortunate in finding such a handsome and gallant cavalier to take care of you. You are very welcome, my boy," he said heartily, laying a fat hand on the young man's shoulder. "Supper has just begun. Come in, *sans cérémonie*! Come and share our simple meal!"

He led the way,—Lenore threw off her opera cloak, thereby showing her dazzling beauty to much greater advantage than before, and slipping her bare rounded arm through Boy's with a little coaxing pressure, she took him into a room of considerable size, where a light supper was laid out with a good deal of elegance, and where several other men were sitting, all rather red-faced, and with something of a free-and-easy air about them. Boy was introduced to the party as "the son of the Honourable James D'Arcy-Muir," whereat he wondered a little, as he could not see what his parentage had to do with his present way of passing his evening. But he presently decided that as his host was a Marquis, no doubt all the gentlemen with him were of the bluest blood and highest degree, and that therefore it was necessary to say who he was, in order that he might be known as a fit companion for such distinguished personages. Suppose they knew he was expelled from Sandhurst! The hot blood surged to the very tips of his ears as

this thought crossed his mind, and he took his seat at table like one in a dream.

"Champagne, Mr. D'Arcy-Muir?" inquired the Marquis courteously, passing the bottle.

"Thanks!" And Boy, filling his glass, raised it to his lips and bowed low to the fair Lenore sitting next to him, who, smiling, bowed in return. And after the little pause which generally follows the entry of a stranger at a feast, conversation began again and soon became argumentative and noisy. Politics and society were discussed, and several of the gentlemen present appeared, for gentlemen, to have some curious notions of honour.

"Oh, hang all that sort of rot," said one, a man with a clean-shaven face, and a physiognomy apparently got up as a copy of Mr. Pinero's—"Success is the only thing you need care about. Money, money, money! People don't care a brass button whether you are honourable or not. Tradesmen are more civil to the fellows who run up long bills than to those who owe short ones. It's all a matter of hard cash. Principle is an old card, long played out."

"Did you see that new girl in the piece at the Harem Theatre last night?" said another. "Little idiot! She can't act. She ought to be a charwoman."

"Perhaps she cannot do charing," suggested the Marquis, nodding at his daughter, who at once

replenished Boy's glass. "It is a *métier*!—it may require study!"

They all laughed.

"She's an idiot, I say," went on the former speaker —"She could make thousands if she would just let the actor-manager do as he likes with her——"

"Gentlemen," interrupted the Marquis with a fierce twirl of his moustache, "I must beg you to remember that my daughter is present!"

Boy looked at him admiringly, and warmed to the fine spirit he exhibited. He, Boy, was rapidly getting indignant at the unmannerly way in which these eating and drinking men were eyeing the exquisite Lenore,—one man had actually wafted her a kiss from the other side of the table,—and she had pretended not to see. But of course she had seen, and was no doubt hurt and disgusted. She must have been disgusted,—any sweet girl like that would feel outraged at such vulgar familiarity! Boy was growing more and more heated and excited as the time went on; he had eaten scarcely anything, but he had taken all the champagne given to him, and there was a buzzing in his head like the swarming of a hive of bees. At a sign from the Marquis he got up unsteadily, and accepting a cigarette went with all the party into a side room, where Lenore drove him to still further desperation and infatuation by taking his cigarette from him, putting it for a moment between her own rosy lips, then lighting it

and giving it back to him with a mischievous curtsey and smile that were enough to confuse a much wiser and clearer head than that of a young man only just turned twenty. Dimly he became aware of a card-table being pushed towards him,—dimly through the brain-fumes of smoke and champagne he heard his host, the Marquis de Gramont, asking him to play a game with them.

"What is it?" he demanded thickly—"I am not clever at cards. Are you?" This with a stupid laugh and sentimental look at Lenore.

"Oh no! I never play anything!" said the young lady, smiling sweetly. "I only look on! But I think baccarat is a very amusing game. Do play!"

Whereupon he sat down with the rest of the men, and was soon, under the guidance of the Marquis, in the full heat and excitement of play. He did not know in the least what he was doing,—he obeyed every hint from the Marquis, or from Lenore, who leaned over his shoulder caressingly and whispered now and then—"I would play that if I were you"—or "I would do that." Everything was in a whirl with him, and he only came to his senses at last with a sharp shock when, at the conclusion of four or five games, the Marquis asked courteously,—

"Would you care to go on any further, Mr. D'Arcy-Muir? Pray do not think me officious for reminding you that you have lost five hundred pounds already!"

Boy started from his chair.

"What? Five hundred pounds! Nonsense! I thought we were playing for fun,—for sixpences,—for——"

"No, not exactly!" said the Marquis urbanely and with a slight smile. "You have been rather unlucky so far,—but if you wish to go on, it is possible you may win back what you have lost."

But Boy still stood amazed, with a wild look in his eyes.

"Lost! Five hundred pounds! My God!" Then rallying a little he looked around him bewilderedly. "To whom do I owe this money?"

The other men laughed carelessly.

"Why, to the winners, old chappie," said one. "The Marquis"—with a slight somewhat sarcastic emphasis on this title,—"will tell you all about it. Don't worry!—he'll settle it all for you."

"I shall be most happy to be of any service to Mr. D'Arcy-Muir," said the Marquis at once. "He has only to give me his note of hand that in ten days he will repay me, and the five hundred pounds is ready for him—even more, if he requires it."

"Repay—five hundred pounds!" And Boy still stared about him in horror and fear. "But—I have not five hundred pence in all the world!"

The Marquis smiled again and stroked his moustache.

"No? That is certainly unfortunate! But your

father, the Honourable Mr. D'Arcy-Muir, will no doubt be answerable for you. This is a debt of honour, of course—not a public matter—but involving serious private disgrace if left unpaid. However, don't distress yourself, my dear boy! I will accept your note of hand at fourteen days instead of ten."

Boy was silent—his face was deadly pale, his eyes bloodshot. Then he suddenly walked up to his smiling host and looked him full in the face.

"I understand!" he said hoarsely. "I begin to realize what *you* are!—and what kind of a trap I have fallen into! Very well! Let it be as you say. Pay these men what I owe to them—what you have made me lose to them, and I will give you my note of hand for the amount. And in fourteen days you shall be paid back—somehow!"

"Good!" And the Marquis went at once to a writing-desk conveniently at hand and scrawled a few lines hastily, which Boy as hastily glanced at and signed with his name and address,—"Thank you!" And the distinguished French nobleman shifted about a little, and avoided with some uneasiness the steady glance of the yonng man's eyes. "Five hundred!—and I will charge you no interest for the loan! Will you play again?"

"Play again?" And Boy turned upon them all with such a tragedy of pain written on his face as for a moment awed even the callous gamesters, accustomed to ruin young men's lives with as little

compunction as they cracked their nuts after dinner. "No! Had I known better I would not have played at all." With a sudden fierce movement he sprang towards the bewitching Lenore and seized her hands, while with a slight cry she tried to drag herself away from him. "You—you—betrayed me into this! *You* brought me here!—*you*, with your beautiful face and beautiful eyes—you whom I thought a good innocent girl! A good girl!" And he broke into a loud harsh laugh, like the laugh of a madman. "God help me! I thought you were good!"

He flung her hands from him with a gesture of loathing and contempt, and then, with one look of miserable defiance at the practised villains who, seated round the card-table, were smoking leisurely and smiling as though they were listening to a very amusing farce, turned and left the room.

His first thought when he stood in the open street again was suicide,—his next, Miss Letty. He walked along swiftly, scarcely heeding where he went, his head burning, his heart throbbing, his whole being possessed by the exceeding wrong done to him by Fate in endowing him with the mere fact of life. He was unconscious of making any protest, yet a protest there was in his own soul which would not and could not have found its way into words, because he did not himself recognize the nature of it. God alone was able to read that protest and understand it,—the terrible indictment brought against those who

had been given this young life to guard and train to noblest results,—an indictment involuntarily and invisibly set before a crowd of witnesses every day by young men and women who owe their mistakes and miseries to the blind tyranny and selfishness of the parents who brought them into existence. If Boy had made an end of his troubles then and there he would not, strictly speaking, have murdered himself so much as his parents would have murdered him. From the earliest beginnings of childhood, all the seeds of his present misery had been sown,—by neglect, by carelessness, by bad example, by uncomfortable home surroundings, by domestic quarrellings,—by the want of all the grace, repose, freedom, courtesy, kindliness and sympathy, which should give every man's house the hall-mark of "Home." His childhood had been sad and solitary—his boyhood embittered by disappointment, followed by the excessive strain of "competitive cram," which had tired and tortured every little cell in his brain to utter exhaustion,—he was old before he had had time to be young. Miss Letty! The thought of her just now in all his wretchedness brought a sudden mist of tears to his eyes. He had forgotten her so long—so long! And when he had seen her last he had scarcely been conscious of her, because so stupefied by the weight of the things he had to remember for his "exam." She had seemed a dream to him, and so had the Major. Now, when the mass of undigested

learning had all rolled off and been absolutely forgotten as though it had never been studied, the remembrance of her love for him as a child came freshly back like a breath from the sea, or the perfume of flowers. He slackened his hurried pace, and grew calmer. The stars were shining brightly above his head, though London was enswathed in a kind of low fog, which crept dismally up from the ground to the top of the ugly brick houses, and there hung like a veil—beyond this, the deep heavens arched high and clear, and Venus shone steadfastly like a lamp to guide lost travellers on their way.

"I will try Miss Letty," he said to himself. "I won't tell her just yet how I have been caught in a gambler's snare—I will just simply ask her if she will lend me a little money. Then if she says 'Yes' I will go to her and explain. I don't think she will refuse."

He carried this plan into action the next day, and wrote to his old friend as follows:—

"Dear Miss Letty,

I am afraid you will have thought me very careless in not writing to you all these years, and very selfish now to write when I have only a favour to ask of you, but I hope you will not mind, and try still to keep as good an opinion of me as you can. I have got into rather a difficulty, and am in

urgent need of a little money. Can you lend me some? I do not know when I shall be able to pay you back, but I do not think you will be a very hard creditor to

Yours affectionately,
BOY."

He posted this in the morning about ten o'clock. At eight the same evening he got his answer, enclosing a cheque for fifty pounds and the following letter:—

"MY DEAR BOY, –
I am so very glad to hear from you again. Please accept the enclosed as a little present. Change it at my bank, and if you like to come and see me afterwards, and talk over your difficulties, I shall be only too happy to help you. I am nearly always to be found at home, as I am rather an invalid.

Your old friend,
LETITIA LESLIE."

The letter dropped from his hand and he looked at the cheque with a kind of despair. Fifty pounds! In his extremity it was useless. How foolish he had been not to ask Miss Letty for the whole sum at once! He took up the letter and read it again—again and again he looked at the cheque.

"Had I better go and see her?" he meditated. "But if I do I shall have to tell her all about the row at Sandhurst,—and this gambling business—she

will think me a regular villain. She must be quite an old lady now—and I should worry her to death. She would be so disappointed in me——"

He looked at the cheque again,—and then—like a black cloud crossing the horizon, a Thought began to creep over his mind, darkening it steadily into gloom. He sat quiet, fingering the cheque and Miss Letty's letter together, his face growing paler and paler,—his eyes harder and colder—his form rigid.

"People should always write the amount they are drawing in plain letters on their cheques," he half-whispered with dry lips—"Miss Letty should have written the *word* 'fifty,' not the *figure* '50.'"

He put away letter and cheque and went to bed early,—not to sleep but to toss about restlessly all night long. What a horrible time he passed!—what fretting dreams tortured him!—what strange and evil faces haunted him, chief among which were those of the "Marquis" de Gramont and his fascinating daughter Lenore—and the smooth cold handsome face of the officer who had first tempted him to drink at Sandhurst. Of his mother and father he never thought,—they had never shown him the slightest sympathy. Once, during this wretched night of fleeting visions, he saw the bent crooked figure and wrinkled countenance of the old sailor Rattling Jack, whose last words had been "I'll just think o' ye as if ye were dead." Death was better than disgrace —and yet—Miss Letty was so good a woman—

she had loved him so much—she would be sure to forgive him—if——!

With the daylight he rose and sat at his writing-table, vaguely turning over bits of paper and scribbling figures on them without any apparent intention,—then after a hurried breakfast he went out. At about half-past ten he made his way to Miss Letty's bank and drawing her cheque out of his pocket, passed it across the counter. The cashier glanced at it with a little uplifting of his eyebrows.

"All in notes, or would you like any gold?" he demanded.

Boy was staring fixedly in front of him and did not hear. The cashier was busy, and spoke again impatiently and with a suspicious glance.

"Notes or gold? Will you have all notes or any gold?"

"Notes, please," answered Boy in a low voice.

The cashier turned over the cheque.

"You have forgotten to endorse it," he said, passing it back and handing him a pen ready dipped in ink.

Boy took the pen—but his hand shook. Again the cashier looked at him suspiciously. When he had endorsed the cheque the cashier vanished into the manager's room and was absent some minutes. Then he came back and said with great civility,—

"Will you kindly call back in an hour? There is a little formality to go through with this before

paying out so large an amount from Miss Leslie's current account——"

"Is there?" stammered Boy, turning deathly white.

"Oh, only a mere matter of form," said the cashier, watching him narrowly, "and our manager is rather busy just now. If you will call back at twelve he will explain everything to you, and hand you over the money."

Boy bent his head mechanically and went out, sick with terror. Meanwhile, one of the bank's confidential clerks, acting on instructions received, went out of the building by a side door, and jumping into a hansom was driven straight to Miss Letty's house. Could he see Miss Leslie? The servant who opened the door was not quite sure,—Miss Leslie was not very well.

"Please say to her that the business is urgent, and that I come from the bank," said the clerk.

Upon this, the servant showed him into the hall, where he waited for a few minutes impatiently. Then he was shown into Miss Letty's morning-room, where, near a sparkling fire, and surrounded by many flowers, sat Miss Letty herself, a picture of fair and tranquil old age, quietly knitting.

"Excuse me troubling you, madam," began the clerk, stumbling awkwardly into the dainty little sanctum, and standing abashed in the presence of this gracious, sweet old lady, who as he afterwards said when speaking of her, looked like a queen.

"Pray do not mention it, sir," said Miss Letty with her old-fashioned courtesy. "I am quite ready to attend to business at any time. Excuse my not rising to receive you,—I am not very strong to-day."

The clerk hesitated.

"Our cashier was not quite certain about this cheque," he at last went on. "As it is not usual for you to draw such a large sum at once out of your current account, we thought it might be as well to make an inquiry before paying it——"

He paused, alarmed at the white face Miss Letty turned upon him.

"What cheque are you speaking of?" she asked. "For a large sum? Pray let me see it."

He took out his pocket-book and handed her the cheque, carefully folded in two,—then awaited her response. With trembling fingers she opened it and read—"Pay to Robert D'Arcy-Muir the sum of £500."

A dark mist swam before her eyes,—she turned faint and giddy—the room whirled round her in a circle of firelight and flowers, with the conventional figure of the bank clerk standing out angularly in the centre,—then with a strong mental effort she recovered herself and quietly re-folded the cheque.

"Yes!" she said faintly, then clearing her voice, she forced herself to speak more distinctly and to smile. "Yes!—it is quite right! Quite—correct!"

And she rose from her chair, her soft grey cashmeres falling about her, and the old lace kerchief

knotted on her bosom heaving a little with her quickened breath. "It is quite correct," she went on. "The young man—Mr. D'Arcy-Muir—presented it himself, no doubt?"

"Yes, madam," said the clerk humbly, "he did, but—we thought it best to ask. Very sorry, I am sure, to have had any doubt! But you see the last '*nought*' is not precisely in your usual way of finishing a figure—and—er—the sum being large——"

"Yes, yes, I see," said Miss Letty, bravely smiling. "My writing is not so good as it was,—I am getting old! Thank you for your trouble in coming,—and thank the manager, please! Tell him it is quite correct!"

She gave him back the cheque, and he accepted it with a bow.

"Sorry to have troubled you, madam, I am sure!"

"Not at all!" said Miss Letty. "Not at all! Good morning!"

"Good morning, madam!"

He left her, and she stood like a creature turned into stone.

"Boy! Oh, Boy!" The name escaped her lips in a half-whisper.

She looked around her—her eyes were dim,—and she was still troubled by a sickening giddiness. She moved to her chair, and laid one hand on the arm of it to steady herself.

"You should have died when you were a child,

poor Boy!" she said still whisperingly—"Poor little Boy! You should have died when you were a child!"

Still she stood rigid and tearless, unconscious of all around her, her blue eyes fixed on vacancy. The door opened—she did not hear it. Violet Morrison, very fair to see in the neat grey gown and spotless white cap of her calling, entered—she did not notice her.

"Miss Letty!"

She started a little, turned her head, and strove to smile and speak, but could not. Violet, alarmed, sprang to her side.

"Darling Miss Letty! What has happened?—What is the matter?"

A deep sigh broke from Miss Letty's lips. She trembled a little.

"Nothing, dear! Nothing! I was only just thinking—of Boy!"

"Were you?" And Violet's face grew more serious. Something was surely wrong with Miss Letty!—she had not mentioned Boy for years. "What made you think of him just now, dearest?" And she slipped her strong young arm about the old lady's trembling figure.

"A little circumstance reminded me," replied Miss Letty dreamily, "of the days when he was a child. Do you see up there, Violet?"—and she pointed to a small shelf above the mantelpiece,—"Those quaint

little shoes? He used to wear them—and rub them out at the toes—you will notice they are quite worn! And that toy there—that cow—it moves its head—he used to call it 'Dunny,' and he loved it so much that he took it everywhere about with him. Such a funny little fellow!—such a dear innocent little man—such an innocent—sweet little man!"

The last words were almost inaudible—for as she spoke them her face suddenly changed and grew ashen grey,—she reeled and would have fallen, had not Violet caught her just in time, and laid her gently back in her arm-chair in a dead faint. The house was soon in confusion,—one servant flew for the doctor, another for Major Desmond, who arrived on the scene just as his old friend was beginning to recover consciousness under the careful tending of Violet, whose trained medical knowledge stood her in good stead.

"What has upset her like this?" he asked, his kind face growing drawn and haggard as he saw the death-like pallor of his beloved Letty's features. "How did it happen?"

"I don't know," answered Violet in a low tone. "I found her standing by her chair, and talking to herself about Boy!"

The doctor soon came, and after careful examination pronounced it to be shock.

"A nervous shock," he said cheerfully. "She'll get all right presently, won't you?" And he patted his

patient's pretty old hand soothingly. "You'll get all right presently?"

Miss Letty lookod upon them all with her sweetly patient air and smiled.

"Oh yes! I shall soon be quite well. You must not worry about me."

"But what's the matter, Letty?" asked the Major tenderly, bending over her chair. "What is troubling you?"

"Nothing, Dick! It was only a little faintness. I am almost well now—almost well!—only weak—very weak——"

She closed her eyes and lay back again in her chair, while Violet still bathed her forehead and chafed her hands. She was reviving gradually, and after a few minutes the doctor took his leave. Out in the hall, however, he beckoned mysteriously to Major Desmond.

"She may last a couple of years or so longer," he said, "but she will require the greatest care,—it is the beginning of the end."

And with a hurried bow after these ominous words, he got into his brougham and was driven away. Major Desmond stood where the doctor had left him, stupefied.

"The beginning of the end!" Letty! He shuddered. Letty had got her deathblow! She was going away to be an angel with Harry Raikes, and sit on a golden throne——

"No! By G——! She shan't!" said the Major desperately. "If she goes I'll go with her!"

Meanwhile, the confidential clerk from the bank, whose visit was the unguessed cause of all this trouble, went back to his chief and reported the result of his mission.

"Well, I'm glad it's all right," said the manager after hearing him out. "I confess I had my suspicions, for Miss Leslie has never drawn five hundred all at once from her current account before. I am sorry I doubted the young man. Tell the cashier to attend to him at once when he calls."

At the appointed hour, Boy came into the bank, walking slowly and feebly, and looking very ill. The cashier greeted him smilingly, and with effusive civility.

"Just ready, sir!" and he began counting out crisp bank notes rapidly.

Boy leaned on the counter looking at him.

"I thought you said there was some formality——" he began.

"Quite right, sir! Yes—so there was, but we hurried the matter by sending the cheque to Miss Leslie and asking her if it was all right——"

Boy took a deep sharp breath.

"And she——?" he began.

"She said it was quite correct. You see we were a little uncertain,—we have to be very cautious in banking matters—sorry to have caused any delay, I'm

sure! Now let me see,—three hundred—two fifties—four hundred—fifty—twenty-five—another twenty-five. Kindly look through the notes before leaving the counter."

Boy did as he was told with shaking fingers.

Then he folded them all together and put them in his pocket, and looked at the cashier very strangely indeed.

"Good morning!" he said.

"Good morning."

Boy walked to the heavy spring door and pulled it open—then passed through and was gone, the cashier watching him till he had disappeared.

"Curious—very curious!" he soliloquized. "That young chap looked as if he had got poison instead of bank notes. I wonder what's up?"

Often did that wonder affect the worthy cashier. The people who came and went in the bank, with money, and without it, were strange enough in their various expressions of countenance and mannerisms to provide many a student with subject-matter for thought,—still, it was not often that so young a lad as Boy was seen there with such a whole history of despair and shame written on his face. And that despair and shame had not lightened with his possession of the much-needed and sorely coveted money,—it had, on the contrary, deepened and become far heavier to bear. But he had now made up his mind as to his immediate course of action. He had

resolved upon it in the very moment that the cashier had handed him the bank notes, and he was only anxious to go through with his intention while it was fresh and newly formed in his mind, lest anything should make him hesitate or falter. He went back straight to his lodgings and there putting all the bank notes into one large envelope wrote the following letter :—

"DEAR GENEROUS MISS LETTY!

I don't know what to say to you for your kindness and your mercy to me, which is so much more than I deserve!—but I know what I ought to do and I am doing it as well as I can. I send you back here all the money I tried to get by the wicked fraud of adding another figure to the one in your cheque —and I hope you will try and forgive me for my attempted and intended theft. I don't understand how it is you can be so good to me as to shield me in this way, but your great mercy has made me bitterly ashamed of myself, and I do beg your pardon with all my heart. I will try to make amends somehow, so that you shall not hear any bad of me again. God bless you always, dear Miss Letty, for your unexpected and most heavenly kindness to your wretched

BOY.

I have brought this letter myself, but I won't come in, as I could not bear to see your kind face just now."

He put this epistle in with the bank notes and sealed the envelope,—then anxious to be rid of the now hateful money and put temptation away from him as far as possible, he took a hansom and drove to Hans Place. The servant who opened the door looked pale and flurried, and her eyes were red as if she had been crying.

"Give this to Miss Leslie, please," he said, holding out the packet.

"Miss Leslie is very ill, sir,' said the girl. "I do not think she will be able to read any letters to-day."

Boy's heart almost stood still.

"*Very* ill? Since when?

"Since this morning, sir. She was taken quite sudden-like."

Boy uttered a little cry. His fault! His fault! If his old friend died, it would be his fault!

"Give her that," he repeated sternly between his set teeth. "If she is not able to receive it, give it to Major Desmond. He will understand. And—when Miss Letty gets better, if she can hear a message, will you say that Boy left his love?"

The servant stared at the pale eager young face and the pained sorrowful eyes.

"'Boy left his love,'" repeated the girl,—"Oh well, sir, wouldn't you like to come in a minute, sir?"

"No!" said Boy almost fiercely. "I'm not fit tc come in! I am a thief and a scoundrel! But all the same—say to her that Boy left his love!"

He rushed away leaving the servant panic-stricken, gazing after him with the sealed packet for Miss Letty in her hands.

Hurrying back again to his lodgings with grief and fury raging in his soul, Boy sat down for a moment to think. The force of his trouble and the mental victory he had gained over himself in the restoration of Miss Letty's money had cleared his brain, and he was able to consider his position more calmly than he had considered it before. A sense of freedom came over him,—he had shaken himself out of a net of crime before it was too late—and it was the beautiful, merciful, angelic spirit of his childhood's friend, Miss Letty, that had saved him! When she had the power to ruin him she had rescued him,—and for this, he resolved to prove himself worthy of her clemency! After a little meditation, he wrote a long letter of explanation to Major Desmond, telling him the whole history of his adventure at the theatre and his visit to the house of the "Marquis" de Gramont, begging him to say the best he could for him to Miss Letty.

"Tell her," he wrote, "that the horror she has saved me from, shall bring out whatever good stuff there is in me, if any. Please do not come to see me, for I could not bear it. And do not send me any money, because I could not bear that either. If you will just let me have a wire saying how dear Miss

Letty is some time to-morrow, that is all I ask of you. And after that, both of you forget me till you hear of me again.

Yours,
'Boy'
(R. D'Arcy-Muir)."

This done he wrote a note to the "Marquis" de Gramont, who had carefully reminded him of his address that very morning. The note was as follows:—

"Sir,
I have placed my affair with you in the hands of my old friend Major Desmond, who will inquire into the exact justice of my debts of honour.

Yours faithfully,
R. D'Arcy-Muir."

Full of nervous hurry and excitement he posted these letters, and could hardly sleep all night for wondering what the answers would be. The next day brought him first of all a wire—"Keep up your courage. Miss Letty much better.—Desmond."

Later on came a letter:—

"Dear Boy,
Yours is a sad and very common story, and this isn't the time for reproaches. Miss Letty, who is an angel, never told me what had happened,—and I

shall not mention to her, unless it is necessary, how you were trapped into de Gramont's little den. Don't trouble yourself about this 'Marquis'; he is no more a marquis than I am, and he is particularly wanted to attend a little party given by the police. You will hear no more of your 'honourable' debts in that quarter. I wish you would be reasonable and let me come and see you. A little talk would do us both good, and I might be able to help you out of present difficulties. *Keep on the square*, and everything will come right.

Yours heartily,

DESMOND."

Boy gave a great sigh of relief. Miss Letty was better—thank God! The money was restored,—and the spectre of the "Marquis" de Gramont was dwindling and dissolving gradually into thin air like a black dream following on a bad digestion. And now—what should he do? One step more—and all was plain sailing. He made that step by writing to his employer and setting himself free of his daily business as a clerk. Then, without pausing to think any more about it, he walked rapidly down to a certain office in a certain quarter, where there were certain showy bills put up outside, the chief lettering on which seemed to be "Her Majesty" in very large capitals. There stepping in, he addressed himself at once to a neat and well-set-up man, in smart uniform,

who was at that moment taking his "rest" in rather a novel way by standing very bolt upright against a wall and smoking.

"Are you the recruiting sergeant?" said Boy.

"I am, young feller! What can I do for you?"

"Oh, nothing in particular," said Boy shyly, with a sudden smile which made his face very captivating. "I want to enlist, that's all!"

The sergeant looked him up and down.

"H'm! You're a gentleman, aren't you?"

"Well, I'm not so sure of that," said Boy with a forced laugh. "I'll try to be one when I'm a soldier!"

Upon which the sergeant gave him such a heavy blow of approval on his shoulder that he almost fell down under it.

"I like that!" he said. "That'll do for me! Sound in wind and limb, aren't you?"

"I think so!" And Boy, warmed and encouraged at heart by the kindly twinkle of the sergeant's keen eyes, began to feel almost happy.

"Right you are! Come along then. Here's your shilling," and he pressed that silver coin, which Boy at the moment desired more than a nugget of gold, into the young man's hand—"Done! Come along—name, age, and all the etceteras—and then a drink—and God save the Queen!"

"Amen!" said Boy as he followed his new commander.

CHAPTER XII

TWO years had fully elapsed since the incidents narrated in the last chapter, and Miss Letty, in spite of the doctor's ominous predictions, was still alive, and, as she expressed it, "in fairly good health for a woman of her age." Major Desmond, however, was a prey to constant alarms, and in spite of the gout and rheumatism which nowadays afflicted him, used to visit her constantly, being always more or less in terror lest she should be snatched away suddenly from him and no time for a last "Good-bye." And Miss Letty, with her always swift perception, saw his anxiety, and considered him very tenderly,—for he, though he did not seem to recognize it, was also suffering from the inevitable aches and pains of age, yet he held himself as bravely as ever. He wasn't going to stoop and crawl about with a stick,—no, not he! And he bravely demonstrated his force of will by walking from his club in Piccadilly to Hans Place whenever his gouty foot was causing him the most acute suffering. Other men in his plight would have taken a cab, or at least availed

themselves of a crutch—but he did neither. And there was so much practical good sense in the resistance he offered to the attempted siege of illness, that he cured himself of threatened attack many a time and saved the doctor's bill.

Both he and Miss Letty had lost sight of Boy. Since the morning on which he had restored the bank notes, and had, as he said, "left his love," he had disappeared mysteriously and unaccountably. The Major had inquired in vain for him at his old lodgings, and finally, in desperation, had essayed the disagreeable task of interviewing his parents on the subject of his whereabouts. But he could get no news from them. The "Honourable" Jim, bolstered up in his chair, with drawn countenance and hollow eyes, was scarcely recognizable, save when his son's name was mentioned, and then he straightway woke up from his semi-lethargy to swear. The Major was therefore reduced to the necessity of endeavouring to get what information he could out of Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, who, breathing hard and heavily like a porpoise, wept profusely at his first question, and allowed her tears to trickle down and mix with the various food stains on the dirty front of the ample dressing-gown in which she now enveloped her elephantine proportions.

"Oh, don't talk to me about Boy!" she said. "Think of my sufferings as a mother! The disappointment I have had to endure is too terrible for

words! The sacrifices I have made for him! The trouble I have had!"

"What trouble?" demanded the Major sharply. "You have done about as little for him as any one could, I fancy!"

Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir stopped producing her tears,—and stared at him with the air of an injured Roman matron.

"Little!" she echoed. "I have done everything for him—everything! Through my efforts, when his father grudged me any money for his education, he went to school in France——"

"And he'd better have stayed at home," interpolated the Major.

"Then I never rested day or night till I could get him to college; and then—and then——"

"Then he was 'crammed,' and forgot that he was anything but a machine to take in facts and grind them to powder,—and then he went to Sandhurst, and then he got expelled for being drunk, having seen his father drunk before him all his life. Yes, ma'am, we know all that! But what I'm asking you now is—what's become of him?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, beginning to be snappish. "I have not seen or heard anything of him for ages. He has deserted his mother! He is ungrateful—unnatural—and cruel! Sometimes I think he cannot be my son. I'm sure"—here she put her handkerchief to her eyes—"the

stories one hears of changelings might really be true,—for Boy was never the same to me after he stayed with Miss Letty."

As she spoke she almost screamed, for the Major, with one big stride, came close up to her and glared down upon her like a figure of fury.

"Why—why, you miserable woman!" he suddenly burst out. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You dare to hint anything against one of the finest creatures God ever made, and the best friend your son ever had—and I'll—I'll *shake* you! I will! If that wretched object inside—Jim—whom I used to know when he was younger, had shaken you long ago it would have done you and him a world of good! You don't know any news of Boy, don't you? Well, *I* do. I know this much, that if Miss Letty had been a woman like you, that unfortunate young fellow you have brought into the world would be serving his time in prison for——Well, never mind for what! But with all his faults and follies he is better than his mother. If I had my way, his mother should hear a thing or two! Yes, ma'am, you may stare at me as much as ever you like—I've often wanted to speak my mind to you, and now I've done it. You were never fit to have a son. You never knew what to do with him when you got him. Your carelessness, your selfishness, your slovenliness, your downright d——d idleness, are at the bottom of a good deal of the mischief he's tumbled into. There, ma'am! I've

said what I think, and I feel better for it. Good morning!"

And before Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir could say another word he abruptly left her, and she heard the street door shut after him with a loud bang. Her husband yelled to her from the adjoining room.

"What's that?"

She went to him, her heavy tread shaking the flooring as she moved.

"It's that horrible old Major Desmond just gone," she said viciously. "He's been most insulting! He actually says *I* am to blame for Boy's turning out so badly!"

The Honourable Jim began to laugh. It was not a pleasant laugh, and the nature of his illness did not conduce to agreeable facial expression. But what latent sense of humour remained in him was decidedly awakened by his wife's indignation.

"You're to blame, eh! He said that? Well, he's right—so you are! So you are!"

"Jim!"

And over her fat cheeks her little eyes peered at him with a look of amazement and wrath.

"I mean it," he persisted thickly, trying to twist his poor paralysed tongue to distinct utterance. "You haven't been fair to me or Boy," and he began to whimper feebly. "The house has always been at sixes and sevens—never knew when one was going to have one's bit or drop—no one in their senses

would ever have called it a home—and you never tried to do me any good. If you had I might not be lying here now. Desmond's right enough—old Dick Desmond was always a good sort of thorough-going chap. He knows what's what. He's right—it *is* your fault. God knows it is!"

His head fell back wearily on his pillow, and his lack-lustre eyes rolled restlessly in his head as if in search for something unattainable. There was something really pitiable in the wretched man's helplessness,—and in the neglected state of his room, where medicine bottles, cups and glasses were littered about in confusion, and where everything showed carelessness and utter disregard of the commonest cleanliness and comfort. But no touch of compunction moved his wife to any consciousness of regret or compassion. On the contrary, she assumed an almost sublime air of majestic tolerance and injured innocence.

"Oh, of course!" she said resignedly, "of course it's my fault! I ought to have known you would say that. It's the way of a man. He always blames the woman who has been good to him—who has waited upon him hand and foot—who has worked for him night and day—who has——" here she began to grow hysterical—"who has loved him—who has been the mother of his son—who has sacrificed herself entirely to her home! Yes—it is always the way! Nothing but ingratitude! But you are ill, and I will not blame you—Oh no, Jim—I'll not blame you, poor

man !—you will be sorry—sorry for being so cruel to your good wife who has been so kind to you !"

With a sort of fat chuckling sob the estimable woman retired—not to weep, oh no! but merely to eat some eggs and macaroni, a dish to which she was particularly partial, and which had consoled her often before for the wrongs inflicted on her as the chief martyr of her sex.

And the Major returned to Miss Letty with the account of his embassy, whereat the gentle soul laughed a little, though there was a sadness in her laughter. All her old affection for Boy as a child had come back in full force for Boy as a young man, now that she knew all the story of his griefs and temptations. For after the affair of the bank notes, the Major had judged it best to tell her of the lad's expulsion from Sandhurst, and when she knew everything, her pity and tenderness for him knew no bounds. Her whole heart went out to him—and she had but one wish—to see him again and lay her hands in a farewell blessing on his head. "Just once before I die," she thought, for she knew in her own soul that death could not be far off—"just to kiss him and say I understand how he was tempted, poor fellow!—and how heartily I forgive him and pray for him."

The Major knew of this secret longing of hers, though she seldom spoke of it, and it was in his great desire to gratify her that he sought everywhere for

some clue to Boy's whereabouts, but in vain. A police raid on the "Marquis" de Gramont's gambling den had effectually cleared that rats' nest out of London, so there were no difficulties left there by means of which Boy might have been traceable. Anxious and disturbed in mind, the good Major rambled up and down the Strand and all the bye-streets appertaining thereto, under the vague impression that he should perhaps find Boy reduced to selling matches or bootlaces at a corner, or coming out of a cheap eating-house,—"for," said the Major feelingly, "he will have to get a dinner somehow or somewhere. One of the chief disadvantages of life on this earth is that none of us can do without feeding. If a world were invented where the creatures in it could exist simply by breathing in the air and drinking in the light, it would be perfection—there would be no cause for quarrelling, strife, or envyings of one another, though I expect some of the fashionable ladies would even then keep things pretty lively by quarrelling over their lovers and their gowns."

Violet Morrison was away from London just at this time. Her course of study in surgical nursing, followed with the most intense and painstaking care, had made her an invaluable assistant to two or three of the greatest surgeons in London—and "Nurse Morrison," as she was called, was always in demand. She was no fancy follower of her profession. She had not taken it up for the express purpose of flirting

with the doctors, and inveigling one of them into marrying her. She had, however, grown into a very beautiful woman, and many a clever and brilliant 'rising man' cast longing eyes of admiration at her fair face and graceful form, as she moved with noiseless step and soft pitying eyes through a hospital ward, soothing pain by her touch and inspiring courage by her smile. But she set herself steadfastly against every hint of love or marriage, and never swerved for an hour or a moment from the lines of work and duty she had elected to walk in. Her only personal anxiety was for Miss Letty, and willingly would she have stayed with her beloved old friend, had not Miss Letty herself refused to be "coddled," as she expressed it.

"If you don't go and do your work, child, I shall fancy I am in immediate danger," she said with a smile, "and I shall die right off before you have time to look round! Go where your duty calls you,—I shall be ever so much better and happier for knowing that you are where you ought to be."

"I ought to be with you, I think," said Violet tenderly. "My first duty is to you."

Miss Letty patted her hand kindly,

"Your first duty is to help those who are in instant need, my dear," she said. "Be quite happy about me,—I am really feeling much better and stronger, and I don't think I shall go away from you just yet—not quite just yet. I think I shall live"—and her eyes softened tenderly—" to see Boy again."

So Violet went, though not till after consultation with her uncle, who swore vociferously that if she remained to "nurse" Miss Letty, it would be all up with her at once.

"She'll get it into her head that she can't be left alone,—that she's just on the point of dropping down dead—and I don't know what else in the way of sickly rubbish," he said warmly. "Look here, child! I've got the gout—and your wiseacres of doctors tell me that it may fly to my heart and do for me in a minute. Well—all I say is, let it! It can't do any more when it's done! But because I have to be dismissed out of the world one way or the other, I'm not going to crawl round on sticks, with a nurse bobbing about after me by way of a walking advertisement to announce—'All's up with this chap! Look at him and bid him good-bye!' Not a bit of it!"

Violet laughed.

"You dear uncle! You are always so plucky!"

"Plucky! There's no pluck about it,—we've all got to die—and when the time comes, let us for heaven's sake go decently and in order, without making a fuss about it. The animals show us a good example—they go into holes and corners to die, in order not to distress their living friends. That's what *we* ought to do, if we were not so deuced conceited as to think ourselves the most valuable objects in all creation. Yet, as a matter of fact, there are a good many horses and dogs who are superior to most men.

No, Violet!—Don't you bother about Miss Letty. *I'll* take care of her. She'll live all the longer for not being fussed over. You talk of pluck! She's twenty times more plucky than I am—and we'll—we'll both make a stand against the final enemy—*together!*"

There was a pathetic note in the Major's voice as he uttered the last few words, and Violet felt her eyes grow suddenly moist. But in her deep respect for the fine old man's personal courage as well as for his fidelity to a lifelong passion, she forbore to utter one word of the sympathy which she knew would be unwelcome.

And time went on, till all at once England was thrilled and aroused by the declaration of war with the Transvaal,—a trumpet note which, re-echoing through the whole Empire, called into action the dormant martial spirit of all the men who love their country and their Queen. Excitement followed upon excitement,—hurried preparations for battle—embarkations of troops—rumours, now of victory, now of defeat,—and all the world was astir with eagerness to see how lion-hearted England would respond to the sudden and difficult demand made upon the strength of her military power. Regiment after regiment was despatched to the front,—ship after ship bore away sons, brothers, husbands and fathers from their homes and families, some to come back again loaded with honour and victory,—some never to return. The Major woke up like an old war-horse who hears the

"réveille" sounded in the darkness of his stable,—and almost forgot his gout in the eagerness with which he tramped to and fro from the War Office to gather up the latest news of friends and old comrades in arms who had thrown up everything to go to the front and be again in active service.

"I never regretted my lost youth till now," he said enviously to his old friend Captain Fitzgerald Crosby, who on account of a certain skill in the management of some special form of gun, was going out to the Cape—"Why, God bless me, Fitz, you're only fifteen years younger than I am!"

"That's true," said Fitz,—"still fifteen years count, old boy! I wish with all my heart you were going with me,—but perhaps you would not care about leaving Miss Letty."

"No—you're right—I shouldn't," said the Major promptly. "I'm not jealous of you—don't you think it! I wish you luck and a late chance of promotion!"

And when Fitz had gone, in company with many others whom the Major knew, another parting took place which caused the old man a very decided twinge of pain, and almost moved him to urge his own personal claims against those of duty. One of the famous surgeons for whom Violet had worked so well, was leaving for hospital work at the front, and made it a particular request that "Nurse Morrison" should also go on the same steamer.

"We don't wan't any amateur 'fancy' nurses out

there," he said, explaining the position to the Major, who heard him with a mingling of pride and pain,—pride that his niece's skill was so highly valued—pain at the idea of her leaving him,—"We want brave capable women, who will be examples to the others, and who really mean to work. There is no one I know who will be so valuable to me in my operations on the wounded as Nurse Morrison. I have talked to her about it, and she is quite willing to go if you give her leave."

The matter had to be decided in a hurry, and so the Major, with a somewhat dismal face, confided it all to Miss Letty, who at once pleaded eloquently that Violet might be permitted to undertake the high duties offered to her.

"Let her go, Dick, by all means," she said. "It's a splendid chance for her—I know she will win the highest honours. She is perfectly fearless, and she may help to save many a valuable life."

"But you, Letty," said Desmond. "Who's going to look after *you*?"

Miss Letty smiled.

"I'm all right, Dick! I have my maid,—and if I get any worse than I am, I will ask my old Margaret to come over from Scotland and nurse me. We mustn't be selfish in our old age, Dick! We must let Violet go. Her services will be invaluable, and if we miss her, as of course we shall, during her absence, we shall at any rate feel we are doing our little best

towards helping our brave soldiers by giving our dear girl to their cause."

And so Violet sailed for the seat of war, bidding her uncle and Miss Letty good-bye with many tears, forebodings and private griefs,—but moved to heroic resolution to do her best where her work was so strenuously demanded. The moment she arrived at the Cape, she and the eminent surgeon who had secured her services were sent on to join the forces moving towards Colenso, and she soon had her mind as well as her hands full with the instructions she received as to the interior arrangements of hospital field tents, and the preparations for what has been rightly termed the "merciful cruelty" of the operating tables.

On the eve of the now famous battle of Colenso she stood at the entrance of one of these tents, pale but resolute, gazing out into space, her heart strangely heavy, her eyes burning with the heat of the dry, dusty air, and her whole mind oppressed with premonitory forebodings. Danger and death seemed very near,—and though cheerfulness was one of her qualities as a nurse, she found it difficult on this particular night to shake off the gloom and dread, which, like a black storm-cloud, steadily darkened down over her soul. She tried to think of all the things connected with her work—of the field hospital train, which she had walked through from end to end at the request of her commanding surgeon, examining

everything, and admiring the forethought and care with which so many comforts had been provided for the coming wounded. The coming wounded! A faint shudder ran through her frame,—how un-Christian, how terrible it seemed, that shot and shell should be used to tear poor human beings to pieces for a quarrel over a bit of land, so much gold, or a difference as to the gain or loss of either!

"If the politicians who work up wars could only realize the true horror of bloodshed they would surely be more careful!" she thought. "It is terrible to be waiting here for the bodies of the poor fellows, mangled and bleeding, who have to suffer the most frightful agonies just at the command of Governments sitting safe in their easy chairs!"

"Thinking of home, Nurse Morrison?" said a cheery voice; and she looked up to see the famous surgeon she served addressing her. "Or of the coming Christmas?"

"Neither, sir. I was thinking of the cruelty of war."

"It is a relic of barbarism," said the great man, the while he peered into the hospital tent and saw that things were as he would have them. "Indeed, it is almost the only vestige left to us of the dark ages. The proper way for civilized nations to behave in a difficulty is to submit to peaceable arbitration. War—especially nowadays—is a mere slaughter-house—and the soldiers are the poor sheep led to the shambles.

The real nature of the thing is covered up under flying flags and the shout of patriotism, but, as a matter of stern fact, it is a horrible piece of cowardice for one nation to try murdering another just to see which one gets its way first."

"I am glad you think as I do," said Violet, her eyes shining. "It is surely better to serve Queen and Country by the peaceful arts and sciences, than by killing men wholesale!"

The surgeon looked at her quizzically.

"Yes, nurse, but you must remember that the arts and sciences are very seldom rewarded—whereas if you kill a few of your human brethren you get notice and promotion! Don't let us talk about it. We must do as we are told. And when the poor chaps are shot at and battered about, we must try to mend them up as well as we can. You've got everything very nice in there—very nice! Now oblige me, nurse, by trying to rest,—for from what I hear you will be actively wanted to-morrow."

He nodded and went his way. Accustomed to obedience, Violet lay down on her little tent-bed, and before she closed her eyes in sleep prayed fervently for her uncle and her "darling Miss Letty."

"I wonder how she is?" she thought, "and I wonder if she has yet heard anything of Boy?"

The morning broke clear and calm over the distant heights called Drakensberg, and an intense heat poured down from the cloudless sky, making the very ground

scorching to the tread. There was not a breath of air, and the scarcity of water made it impossible to cool the tents by ordinary means. Violet awoke to the thunderous crash of the British naval guns opening fire on Fort Wylie. As dawn deepened into day, the bombardment grew faster and more furious, but no response came from the hidden enemy. For some time, storms of shell and shrapnel poured on in their destructive course without any apparent result, till all at once one shot crashed fiercely from the hills behind Colenso. This was followed by an appalling roar of guns and a deluge of fire from the Boer line of defence, and the fray began in deadly earnest. Sick and terrified at first by the hideous din, Violet instinctively put her hands to her ears, and sat, with one or two of the other nurses, well within the first field hospital tent, waiting for she knew not what. Once the great surgeon looked in, pale with excitement.

"Be ready, all of you!" he said briefly. "This is deadly work!" And he was gone.

"Are you not afraid?" asked one of her companions, whispering to Violet.

"Afraid?" she answered. "Oh no, not afraid,—only sorry! Sorry with my whole heart and soul for what these poor soldiers will have to suffer! I am thinking of them all the while—not of myself."

The hammering of the guns continued, and far away, from the heights, invisible cannon thundered

and boomed. As the day advanced the combat grew more closely contested, and wounded men were beginning to be rapidly carried to the "donga," or shelter, at the rear of the British forces. Disaster followed disaster; and presently a word was whispered that turned the hearts of the waiting women in the tents cold—"defeat." Defeat! For the British? Surely there was no such possibility! Defeat! While they were whispering together in low awe-struck voices, the great surgeon suddenly entered with some of his assistants, his sleeves rolled up, his whole manner emphatically declaring work—and work too of the promptest and smartest character. Violet moved at once to his side.

"Do as I tell you," he said, "and—you must not shrink! You will see some horrible sights. Are you prepared?"

"Quite!" she replied tranquilly. He gave one glance at her calm face and steadfast eyes—nodded approvingly, and went on with his preparations. A young lieutenant suddenly rushed in.

"They've shot the Colonel!" he exclaimed wildly. "He wouldn't leave the guns! They wanted him to, but he said 'Abandon be damned! We never abandon guns!'" And away he rushed again.

On went the crash of the Maxims behind the Boer trenches,—the earth was torn up in every direction by the bursting of lyddite shells—dead and wounded were brought in by their comrades, or carried on

ambulances by the Army Medical Corps. The nurses were soon more than busy,—Violet Morrison did her best to soothe the frantic ravings of many of the men who, growing delirious with pain, fancied themselves still fighting on the field, and filled the air with their shoutings. "Look to the guns! Splendid! Splendid work! Don't leave the guns!" And the hospital tent she controlled, so quiet and orderly some hours previously, was now transformed into a scene of breathless horror and interest.

The hot suffocating day went on, till, as the afternoon lengthened towards evening, there came the appalling news that the young and gallant Lieutenant Roberts, the only son of one of the most heroic of English generals, had been killed in a brave attempt to rescue the guns. This awful fatality seemed to create something of a panic among the bravest,—some of the steadiest heads lost account of what they were doing for the moment, and by a fatal forgetfulness on the part of the Staff, orders were never given to the Devons and Scots Fusiliers to leave the "donga" where they, with many wounded, were sheltered. Faithful to their duty, these unfortunate and valiant men remained where they were, waiting till they were told to move,—with the dire result that as the evening closed in the enemy crossed the river and treacherously surrounded them under cover of the white flag. Cruel slaughter followed,—but in the very midst of

the fire and the falling men, a young officer on horseback suddenly dashed out from behind a hillock, galloping with all his might and bearing a wounded comrade across his saddle. A rain of shots greeted his appearance, but he seemed to bear a charmed life, for he raced on and on through the hail of bullets and never stopped till he reached the first field hospital tent, where his horse suddenly reeled and fell dead, bringing himself and his wounded burden to the ground.

Some of the medical staff were round him in an instant, and as soon as he could get breath he spoke.

"I'm not hurt," he explained, "but this chap is. I found him wounded—and a rascal Boer making a barricade of his body to hide himself behind while he fired at our men. I shot the Boer, and took away this fellow—he's a young private—I'm afraid he's done for. I should like to know who he is, for he gave a sort of cry when I took hold of him, and called me 'Alister,' and swooned right off. Alister's my name—so he must know me."

He shook himself like a young lion, free of dust, and wiped away the blood that was trickling from a small scar in his cheek. His wish that the comrade he had rescued should be attended to at once was gratified as quickly as possible, and as the surgeon bared the terrible wounds of the insensible mangled human creature before him he shook his head.

"No hope!" he said,—"it's no use operating here! It would only prolong the poor fellow's agony. He's coming to, though. Do you think he knows you?"

"Well, my name's McDonald," said the young officer,—"Alister McDonald. My father's in the Gordon Highlanders. And this chap called me Alister. Let me have a look at him." He came up to the side of the wounded soldier, who was gradually returning to consciousness with heavy shuddering breaths of pain,—and looked long and earnestly in his face. Then he gave a sharp exclamation.

"By Jove! It's Boy!"

Violet Morrison heard the cry, and turned swiftly.

"Boy!" she exclaimed, and came forward, her lips apart, her whole frame trembling. Alister McDonald looked at her in surprise and admiration.

"Do you know him?" he said. "I've never seen him since he was a little chap, but I remember his face quite well. I don't know how he comes to be a private, though. I think it must be the same fellow. His name is Robert D'Arcy-Muir——"

But Violet, bending down over the poor shattered frame of the dying man, quickly recognized, through the trickling blood and clammy dews of fever heat, the delicate refined features and clustering fair locks which had once been the fond admiration of one of the sweetest women in the world, and, despite all her efforts at self-control, a low sob escaped her.

" Oh my darling Miss Letty ! " she whispered—" Oh Boy ! "

Young Alister McDonald heard her.

" Miss Letty ! " he echoed with quick interest—" Oh, then it must be Boy. He stayed with her up in Scotland at a house just opposite my father's——"

The surgeon raised a warning finger,—and he was silent. Boy opened his eyes, dimly blue, and slowly glazing over with a dark film, and looked up in the face of " Nurse Morrison."

" Have we won ? " he asked faintly.

The surgeon laid his firm kind hand upon the fitfully beating pulse.

" Don't fret ! We *shall* win ! " he said.

Boy gazed blankly up from his straight pallet bed.

" Shall we ?—I don't know—it's all defeat—defeat ! —and they've got the guns !—by treachery. Where's Alister ? "

" Here ! " said the young lieutenant, advancing. " Cheer up, old chap ! "

" I knew it must be you ! " said Boy, trying to stretch out his hand. " When you shot that Boer coward—and took me up on your horse—I knew !— Alister all over !—You were always like that—about fighting the enemies of England—do you remember ? "

" Yes, I remember "—and Alister affectionately touched that feebly groping hand—" Don't you worry ! It's all right ! "

"Ah, you've done something brave—already!" murmured Boy. "You always said you would—you wanted to be a hero, and you've—you've begun! I wanted to do something great too—for Miss Letty's sake. . . ."

His voice sank. Moved by a passionate wish to rouse him once more, Violet Morrison suddenly put her arms round him as he lay, and said clearly—

"Boy!"

He stared at her, and a little smile crept round his mouth.

"Boy!" she went on sobbingly—"Can you hear me—can you understand?"

He made a faint sign of assent.

"I know Miss Letty," she went on in her sweet thrilling tones—"and you have seen me, and I have seen you, only you don't remember me just now. Poor Boy! I know Miss Letty—and I know how she loves you and wants to see you again!"

The smile grew sweeter on the poor parched lips.

"Does she?" His voice seemed to come from a long way off, so faint and feeble it had grown. "Ah! But I must do something great—and she will forgive me——"

"She has forgiven you!" said Violet.—"Oh Boy!—dear Boy!—try to understand!"

A grey shadow fell warningly on his features, but he still kept his eyes fixed on Violet.

"Does—she—know?"

"She knows—she knows!" answered Violet, unable now to restrain her fast falling tears. "She knows how hard everything was for you—yes, dear Boy, she knows!—and she loves you just as dearly now, as when you were a little child!"

A grave peace began to compose and soften his face, as though it were touched by some invisible sweet angel's hand.

"Tell her—that I enlisted—to get a chance—of making amends—doing something good—brave—to make her proud of me,—but it's too late now—too late. . . ."

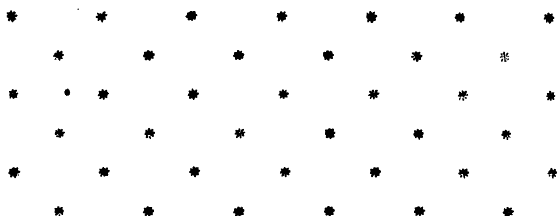
A terrible convulsion seized him, and the sharp agony of it caused him to spring half upright. The surgeon caught him and held him fast—he stared straight before him, his eyes shining out with an almost supernatural brightness—then all the light in them suddenly faded—the lids drooped—and he sank back heavily. Violet put her arms round him once more, and drew the fallen head, disfigured and bleeding, to her bosom, weeping and murmuring still—

"Boy! Oh Boy!"

"It's all right!" he said dreamily—"All forgiven—all right! Don't cry. Tell Miss Letty not to cry. Tell her—Boy—Boy left his love!"

An awed silence followed—and then—young Alister McDonald, with a tenderness which, though he knew it not, was destined to deepen into a husband's life-

long devotion later on, drew the weeping Violet gently aside that she might give her tears full vent, —while the surgeon reverently drew a covering over the quiet face of the dead.



At home in England the news of the battle of Colenso and the capture of the British guns was received by a whole world with incredulity and dismay. Throngs of people crowded the War Office, clamouring for news—pouring out inquiries and lamentations,—reading the terrible list of casualties, and while reading scarcely believing what their own eyes beheld. Major Desmond, furious at the mere idea of any disaster to the British arms, stood reading the list, without half understanding what he saw, so bewildered and stunned was his mind with the cruel and unexpected nature of the dispatches from the front, till all at once he saw—

"Captain Fitzgerald Crosby. Killed."

He staggered back as though he had received a blow.

"What, Fitz? Poor old Fitz! Gone so soon? No—surely not possible!"

He read the announcement again and again, feeling quite sick and giddy; and his eyes, wandering up and down the column, suddenly fell on the name "D'Arcy-Muir."

"Robert D'Arcy-Muir—Private. Killed."

"Now wait a bit!" said the Major, sternly apostrophising himself—"This won't do! You're dreaming, old man! It's no good fancying oneself in a nightmare. Robert D'Arcy-Muir,—private—in what regiment?—Scots Fusiliers. Now let me see!"

He went straight to one of the chief authorities at the War Office—a man whom he knew intimately and who would be most likely to help him.

"Robert D'Arcy-Muir,—private—Scots Fusiliers? Curious you should ask me about him!—his name came under my notice quite by chance two years ago. Yes—I remember the case quite well. He was the only son of an officer of good family, Captain the Honourable D'Arcy-Muir. He was at Sandhurst, but unfortunately got expelled for being drunk and disorderly. He told his story, it appears, quite frankly, when he enlisted, and his honesty stood him rather in good stead. He was quite a favourite with the regiment, I believe. Killed, is he?—And you knew him?—Sorry, I'm sure. Will I see that his parents are informed?—Certainly. Have you the address? Thanks. They didn't know he had enlisted? Odd! They couldn't have cared much. I suppose they dropped him when he

was expelled. Good morning! I'm afraid you've had a shock. These are trying times for every one."

And the Major's informant shook hands with him kindly, and turned to other matters, for urgent business was crowding his hours of time, and there was more than enough for him to do. Desmond went out of his presence, weary, broken down, and as it were stricken old for the first time. The curt and sudden announcement of the death of his old chum 'Fitz' had overwhelmed him—and now, the certainty of Boy's death as well, a death so swift, so tragic, so far away from home, made him shudder with fear and horror as he thought of Miss Letty. She had been very ailing since Violet had gone to South Africa, and yielding to the Major's entreaties she had sent for old Margaret, her former faithful attendant. And Margaret had had come at once, and now scarcely ever left her. To Margaret she talked constantly of Boy, and the hopes she had of seeing him again—hopes, alas!—that were now to be completely and for ever destroyed.

"Shall I tell her?" thought the Major woefully—"or shall I keep it secret for a little while? But if I do not speak, his parents will be sure to write and inform her. Nothing would please that woman D'Arcy-Muir more than to frighten her with a big black-bordered envelope. I think I'd better try and break it to her gently. Poor Fitz! He's got his promotion! Well! I suppose it's the way he would have liked best to die if he'd been given a choice.

But Boy! So young! Poor fellow—poor little chap! —with mettle in him after all! Wasted life—wasted hope—wasted love—all a waste! God knows I've done my best to keep a stout heart—but upon my soul, life is a sad and cruel business!"

With slow and lagging footsteps he made his reluctant way to Hans Place and to Miss Letty's always bright house, though it was scarcely so bright now as it used to be, for the hand of its gentle mistress was not so active and her supervision was not so careful and vigilant. And to the Major's deeply afflicted mind the fact that some of the blinds were down, impressed him with an uncomfortable sense of gloom.

"Looks as if she were mourning for Boy already!" he murmured, as he rang the bell.

Margaret opened the door.

"How is Miss Letty?"

"Well, sir, she was a bit nervous last night and low in her spirits—but this morning she woke up quite bright and bonnie-like—more like her old self than she's been for many a day. And she said to me, 'Margaret, I think I shall hear news of Boy to-day'——"

The Major gave a sigh that was more a groan.

"She said that?"

"Ay sir, 'deed she did. But you're lookin' wan and weary yourself, sir,—I hope there's no bad tidings——"

The Major interrupted her by a grave gesture.

"Where is she?"

"Just in the morning-room as usual, sir, reading. I left her there an hour ago—she had some letters to write, she said—and she was just as bright and cheery as could be—an' a little while since I peeped in and she was sitting by the fire wi' a book——"

"All right. I'll go to her. If I want you, I'll call."

He entered the morning-room with a very quiet step. There was a bright fire sparkling in the grate, and Miss Letty was seated beside it, in her arm-chair, with a book on her knee, her back turned towards him. Her favourite bird was singing prettily in its cage, pecking daintily now and then at the bit of sugar she daily gave it with her own hands. The Major coughed gently. Miss Letty did not stir. Somewhat surprised at this, he advanced a little farther into the room.

"Letty!"

No answer.

"My God!"

He sprang to her side.

"Letty!—Letty dear!—Letty!—Not dead! Oh, Letty, Letty!—Not dead!"

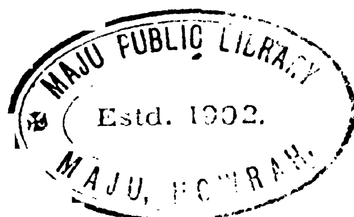
A smile was on her sweet old face,—her eyes were closed. The great Book resting on her knee was the Book which teaches us all the way to Heaven,—and her little thin white hand, with its diamond betrothal

ring sparkling upon it, lay cold and stiff upon the open page. Overcome by too great an awe for weeping or loud clamour in the presence of this simple yet queenly majesty of death, her faithful lover of many years knelt humbly down, broken-hearted, to read the words on which that hand rested.

"Peace I leave with you,—My peace I, give unto you,—not as the world giveth, give I unto you!"

And kneeling still, he reverently kissed that dear, loyal, pure little hand,—once and twice for the sake of the slain "Boy" lying at rest in his South African grave,—once and yet again for his own deep love of the Angel gone back to her native home with God, and murmured,—

"Better so, Letty! Better so!"



THE END.

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